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Changing Covenants in Samoa? From Brothers and Sisters to Husbands and Wives?

Latu Latai

Australian National University

ABSTRACT

This article explores how in the process of Christian conversion in Samoa by the London Missionary Society, the indigenous sacred covenant between brother and sister was transposed onto the relation between the pastor, his wife, and the congregation. I consider how far Victorian models of gender and domesticity, based on more individuated modes of personhood and the nuclear family, were promoted by foreign missionaries and whether Samoan people accepted, resisted, and transformed these models. In Samoa, women had assumed powerful statuses as feagaiga *'covenants' and as* tamasa *'sacred child'. These ascriptions gave Samoan women sacred power and they were highly esteemed in their families and natal villages. What impact would Christian conversion have on this high valuation of Samoan women? And how would this transformation impact on Samoan ideas about gender and personhood?*

Keywords: *Feagaiga*, Christianity, capitalism, Samoa, personhood.

INTRODUCTION

The study of women's status and valuation in the wake of western contact has long been explored, particularly with regard to the important question of whether the status of women necessarily declined with western colonisation. Christine Gailey argues that all Tongan women have lost important sources of structural authority and autonomy since the contact period. Europeans such as missionaries, traders, and colonial advisors all shared certain assumptions about maleness and femaleness, appropriate spheres of activity for women and men, and progress through civilisation in the western sense (Gailey 1980). As a result, she argues, Tongan women have lost many of the prerogatives they once enjoyed, although this has been contested by Kerry James (1988). In Hawaii, Jocelyn Linnekin (1990) argues that the structural importance and the personal authority of Hawaiian women were enhanced rather than harmed in the early post-contact period. Although Hawaiian women were progressively devalued from the point of view of western white society, paradoxically, Hawaiian women at the same time assumed an increasingly active and structurally central role at the local level. Linnekin's argument criticises the overly deterministic view of world system theory promoted by Gailey that neglects issues of local adaptation and resistance. She argues that caution must be taken against an assumption of 'one-way directionality' in capitalist expansion (Linnekin 1990:237). In this article, I will look at how Christian conversion in Samoa impacted on the status of women. Missionaries, in their efforts to 'uplift' the status of women, emphasised the role of women as mothers and wives while downplaying their sacred and powerful role as *feagaiga* 'covenant'. Moreover, in the process of conversion, this sacred status of women was transposed onto the pastoral couple. Thus, the coming of Christianity clearly challenged the revered status of women in Samoa. However, although this in itself had a negative impact on Samoan women, processes connected to the rise of capitalism in the twentieth century have

inadvertently had a positive impact, but one that would see lasting changes to Samoan ideas about gender relations and relational personhood, as well as the emergence of patterns of individualism in Samoa. My argument pertains mainly to the westerly islands of the Samoa group – an area that is now called Samoa – and I consider oral history as far back as Samoan elders remember, as well as my own experience as a Samoan church minister and a son of a Samoan church minister.

DEFINING *FEAGAIGA*

According to the London Missionary Society (LMS) missionary George Pratt, who published the first Samoan dictionary in 1862, the word *feagaiga* refers to an established relationship between different parties such as those between brothers and sisters and their children, and between chiefs and *tulafale* 'orators'. Furthermore, he stated that the term is adopted generally to mean an agreement or a covenant (Pratt 1862). Yet, in the early period soon after the arrival of missionaries in 1830, the word *feagaiga* was already widely used by missionaries to refer to covenants in the Bible. In the LMS missionary magazine, *O le Sulu Samoa*, which was first published in 1839 entirely in the Samoan language, the term was used to refer, for example, to the covenants in the Old Testament between Jehovah and the people of Israel, between Jehovah and Abraham, and other patriarchs of the Old Testament.[1] These Biblical covenants were considered sacred and involved certain promises, taboos, and obligations, to which both parties must adhere. Missionaries saw the parallels of these covenants in the relationships between brothers and sisters and chiefs and their orators and applied the term 'covenant' to these indigenous relationships. This concept of covenant, however, is different from the idea of *feagaiga* in its indigenous sense. In the Biblical sense, God and humanity are presented in opposite and unequal terms. One is clearly powerful and dictates the terms of the agreement, while the other is merely a subject to that agreement. This is vastly different to the encompassing and complementary nature of the *feagaiga*.

The word *feagaiga* comes from the word *feagai*, which means to be opposite to another. In Samoa, to be opposite in this sense does not denote a state of oppositional conflict but rather of persons or parties being of reciprocal and mutual status and valuation. *Feagai* is a crucial aspect of Samoan life, which dictates how people relate to each other and is deeply connected to values such as *tapu* (taboo), *faaaloalo* (mutual respect), and *va tapuia* (sacred and relational space) (Tamasese 2009; Wendt 1999). It applies to various social relationships within the family and the village. For example, certain roles and ways of behaviour are viewed as appropriate according to age and status. The young are obliged to talk respectfully to their elders, using *gagana faaaloalo* or respectful language. Untitled men are to approach *matai* or holders of chiefly titles with courtesy. In a formal setting, both within the family and village, members are seated according to their status. It would be inconceivable for one of lesser status to sit opposite a high-ranking chief. Seating arrangements are therefore important in establishing and rendering visible orders of hierarchy within a social gathering. This order of hierarchy should not be seen from a western sense of inequality, but rather in terms of everyone encompassing the other (Tcherkézoff 2009). Thus, the word *feagai* on a deeper level refers to a state of collective aptness and appropriateness. This has a different sense to that of an agreement, which often in English refers to choices between agents more individually conceived.

In Samoa, this state of aptness is expressed in oratorical expressions at formal occasions, when people are appropriately seated according to status and rank. One such expression is '*Ua feagai segaula*', meaning all sides are befittingly seated and paired like lory birds. When such expressions are stated, it means that everything is in a state of order and that the meeting or

ceremony can proceed. This state of order is what Tupua Tamasese refers to as the sacred relation or 'harmony' to which Samoans aspire, including harmony among people, with the cosmos, and with the environment. This harmony is based on the Samoan belief that all things – living and non-living, physical and spiritual – are deeply integrated and dependent on one another (Tamasese 2009). Concepts such as *tapu*, *faaaloalo*, and *va tapuia* are crucial in maintaining this harmony and life itself. The term *feagaiga* broadly applied is a foundational Samoan worldview that dictates how people relate to one another and the world that surrounds them. Applied to social relations, the term *feagaiga* is a 'covenant' directed at maintaining a state of harmony within kin and Samoan society as a whole.

THE SAMOAN WOMAN AS *FEAGAIGA*

In Samoa, women as sisters are called *feagaiga*. This refers to the sacred covenant of mutual respect between a brother and a sister, within their natal family, which gives special honour to the sister and reciprocal tribute to the brother. The special relationship between brother and sister clearly illustrates a view of the world that denotes encompassment and mutual respect for the other. In Samoa, this relationship is vital to what George Milner postulates as the principal of 'social balance' (Milner 1968). In this covenantal relationship, both parties have obligations that dictate their behaviour towards each other. From childhood, brothers and sisters observe certain taboos. The brother is taught to show deference to his sister. In her presence and later in her house, no indecent conversations could be engaged in. There is a particular taboo on everything sexual. A boy is not allowed to even touch his sister's personal possessions, particularly her clothing or the mat she sleeps on. This is because incest is strictly taboo and is thought to lead to a curse on the family.

A brother's obligations are based on the Samoan belief that the sister as *feagaiga* is a *tamasa* or 'sacred offspring'. In ancient Samoan theology, sisters were regarded as vessels of divinity with powers to attract the supernatural. The brother therefore is required to serve and care for his sister as long as he lives. There are several sayings in the Samoan language that bear out this service or *tautua*: *O le ioimata i le mata o le tuagane lona tuafafine* (The sister is the pupil of the eye of the brother) and *E mu mata o le tama i lona tuafafine* (The brother's face burns for his sister). These sayings speak of the respect shown in this relationship where sisters are given privileged treatment. All of the brother's services given to the sister must be agreeable to her, for it is generally believed that the sister has the power to curse him if she is not pleased. Sisters as sacred beings were therefore highly revered and feared. According to Samoan belief, to ignore the wishes of the *tamasa* would lead to misfortune, sickness, or death of a family member (Cain 1971; Deihl 1932; Schoeffel 1979; Stair 1897). For the brother, it could mean barrenness or infertility. In ancient Samoa, sisters as *feagaiga* were also regarded as spiritual mediators who held priestly roles within the family. They shared this role with the family chief (Le Tagaloa 2003).

The *feagaiga's* venerated status, however, comes with serious responsibilities. She is called *o le pae ma le auli* or the shell and the iron referring to her role as the peacemaker – the one who resolves any frictions within her family. She is the *faioa*, the maker and provider of cultural wealth and valuables like *ietoga* or fine pandanus textiles and *siapo* or *tapa* that are extremely important and essential in the social and cultural life of Samoans. These highly valuable items are not only essential to ceremonial gift exchanges but are crucial in the custom of *ifoga* or public apology in which the culprit is covered with the *ietoga*. The *ietoga* symbolically acts to protect the culprit from any harm, and in this way, the culprit can be redeemed. The redemption relates to the sister's role as the *tausala* or redeemer and *taulaga* or offering who will be able to ransom or redeem the family in times of dire need. Most

significantly, the sister carries the *mamalu* or honour of the family, which she has to maintain by keeping her virginity. Although in ancient Samoa, the idea that virginity was expected of all females has been extensively challenged, universal female virginity still prevails in Samoa today and the failure of sisters to maintain their virginity would always bring shame to their brothers and the rest of the family. This has perhaps been strengthened by the influence of Christianity.

The traditional sacred valuation of Samoan women as *feagaiga* gives them important power and influence. They receive equal respect to that of the family chief. Women are given the attribution of *seesee talaluma* (the one who sits in the front part of the house). In a family gathering, this is her rightful place, depicting her esteemed status. She and the *matai* are the first to be served. During important decision-making meetings relating to family matters, her opinion is highly regarded and sought after. In many cases, it is the sister who has the power to veto decisions of the family.[2] When deciding a new holder of the family *matai* title, the sister in her own position could claim the title as every family member is an heir irrespective of gender. However, on many occasions, she gives the title to her brother, as a sign of respect and honour for his services. Accordingly, for a *feagaiga* to claim a *matai* title means she has to relinquish her *feagaiga*-ship. Women's claims to chiefly titles therefore were rare even in pre-Christian times. An exception to this is Salamasina, who rose to prominence in the sixteenth century and was the first to hold all four paramount titles in Samoa, making her the queen of a united Samoa. Apart from her, there are no records of women holding chiefly titles, though this could be because of the presumptions of early colonial administrators, ethnographers, and missionaries, who often recorded genealogical history with a patrilineal or masculinist bias (Gunson 1987).

This power of women is seen collectively in the village setting in which all the sisters and daughters of the local men make up the social institution of *aualuma*, 'the front group'. This describes the *aualuma*'s prestigious position within the village ranking, because it constitutes the *feagaiga* of the village. Here we see how the covenant relationship between the brother and sister plays out at village level. In pre-Christian times, the institution of the *aualuma*, as the front group, stood for the honour and respect of the village. In times of war, the *aualuma* led in order to solicit the favours of the gods.[3] They were responsible for guarding the virginity of the *taupou* or the virgin daughter of the village high chief, before her marriage to a chief of high rank. This responsibility was significant because of its political impact. The institution of the *taupou* was vital in linking families and villages all over Samoa through the multiple marriages of chiefs to high-ranking women (Gunson 1987; Schoeffel 1979; Schoeffel and Daws 1987). The failure of the *taupou* to remain a virgin would result not only in disgracing the honour and respect of the village but also in the retraction of the marriage. Moreover, the *aualuma* in pre-Christian times made up the *nuu o tamaitai*, or village of ladies, a parallel body of authority to that of the *nuu o alii* or village of men. A good example of this powerful social organisation, which has survived the test of time, is the *nuu o tamaitai* of the village of Saoluafata. This continues to play a powerful political role complementary to the male council of chiefs, although as Manumaua Luafata Simanu Klutz argues, that role has been challenged more recently by their male counterparts (Simanu-Klutz 2011).

In pre-Christian Samoa, then, women as *feagaiga* held important status that gave them superior power and an encompassing role over their brothers. Moreover, the brother–sister covenantal relationship was also central to maintaining a state of aptness and harmony within Samoan society, both within the family and in the village as a whole. But although this covenantal relationship between brother and sister continues to some extent to prevail today, much of it has been transformed by the influence of western colonisation and Christianity.

THE PASTOR AS *FEAGAIGA*

The evangelisation of Samoa from 1830 by the LMS saw the introduction of a new figure in the form of the pastor. With the coming of Christianity, the pastor was seen as corresponding to the traditional priest or spirit medium, and the authority of the *feagaiga* in communicating with the gods was attributed to him. Malietoa Vaiinupo, the paramount chief who received the first missionaries in 1830, made them the *quasi*-sisters of each village, by bestowing on them the title *Faafeagaiga* (Aiono Le Tagaloa 1996).[4] Today, when one refers to a pastor, one says '*Lau susuga i le Fa'afeagaiga*' (Your Honourable the 'Covenant'). The prefix '*fa'a*' is a causative prefix that means 'to be,' *fa'afeagaiga*, thus meaning 'to be *feagaiga*.' Here we see the qualities of the *feagaiga*, which gave Samoan women important power and influence, being transposed to the pastor. Transposing the attributes of the *feagaiga* onto the pastor was for Samoans the most appropriate way of integrating this novel figure into Samoan society (Tcherkézoff and Douaire-Marsaudon 2008a). Samoan paramount chiefs who accepted Christianity had their own *feagaiga*, their sisters to whom they were obligated. They were also in similar relationships with their orators. So, given the importance of integrating the new religion, the pastor was ascribed this honour. The *feagaiga* was now recognised in the relationship between the pastor and the village. The pastor was now a man of divine power, hence his word was revered and he was feared because his curse would surely lead to misfortune and death.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the status of the pastor was greatly elevated. Within the village, he was treated with great privilege. LMS missionary accounts have shown that Samoan pastors were already fully supported by their local parishes by the 1850s.[5] The village now plays the brotherly role of service to the pastor as their *feagaiga*, and in return, the pastor maintains his *mamalu*, or 'honour', and intercedes on behalf of the village. He becomes the priest, the peacemaker, and most significantly, the redeemer in times of feuds and conflicts. When a member of the village or a family commits a serious crime, or refuses to adhere to the rules of the village *fono* or council of chiefs, the pastor's intervention redeems the culprit and reconciliation can be made between the two parties. This is enacted in the custom of *ifoga*,[6] or public apology, in which the pastor takes the place of the culprit, by covering himself with an *ietoga* in front of the victim's family. This redeeming role of the pastor is also seen during *malaga* or visits when villages travel to other villages, for recreational events like sports and entertainment, or cultural ceremonies like funerals, weddings, or the bestowal of important titles. During such visits, the pastor's residence becomes a house of refuge for the visitors. If a member of the visiting party breaks a taboo or commits a crime in the host village, the house of the pastor can provide safety and protection for the visiting party.[7]

The transposition of the roles and status of the *feagaiga* onto the pastor was highly appropriate and successful. The pastor became like a sister to the village, especially in taking care of the people's spiritual needs. He became a spiritual mediator, peacemaker, and redeemer, keeping the good relations among members and families within the village. Like sisters in their covenantal relationship with their brothers, the pastor assumed these serious responsibilities. In return, the village privileged him with respect and provided for his physical needs. He was given land and a house was built especially for him and his family.

In ascribing the attributes of the *feagaiga* to the pastor, his influence is thus confined to the sacred or the spiritual, and plays no political role in the village. This is affirmed by the rule that the pastor must have no direct family or immediate blood connections to the village. This is still the policy of Samoan Protestant churches today.[8] Thus, although highly revered, pastors remain outsiders in the political affairs of the village. They are not allowed to sit in the proceedings of the council of chiefs, unless in special cases when they are invited to open a meeting with a prayer. As outsiders, they must refrain from being involved in the secular

activities of the village and in particular the political activities of chiefs. This is similar to the status of sisters as *feagaiga* who largely refrain from the sphere of chiefs out of respect for their brothers as well as their high status as *feagaiga*. However, as mentioned, the *feagaiga* still holds great influence in the decision-making of her natal family and in the village through the institution of the *aualuma*. However, the pastor does not have a similar influence; because of his sacred status, he can at times influence the council of chiefs, particularly concerning issues that might affect the peace and harmony of the village.

Unlike sisters within their natal family, the pastor is necessarily married. As mentioned, virginity before marriage was crucial to maintaining the sacredness and honour of the sister. For the pastor, virginity and purity are expressed through monogamy. Adultery or inappropriate sexual behaviour are seen as unbecoming to the pastor's role and are totally unacceptable. Once such a taboo is broken, the pastor loses his honour and the covenant is broken. High moral behaviour is therefore expected of the pastor. Such expectations also extend to his wife and children. The status and roles of the wife are no less important than those of her husband. She is given the title *faletua*,[9] the advisor to the pastor, the one who backs and gives support to the pastor – a role that parallels that of a high chief's wife. This role is extremely important and is essential to the operation of the church at village level. From a Samoan perspective, she is not of lesser status and she is treated in the same manner as that of the wife of a high chief. Her crucial role is testified by the fact that once a pastor is called into covenant with a village, or *osi le feagaiga*, he must be married. Moreover, in the case where the wife dies, the pastor must remarry as soon as possible in order to remain in the village. This remains the rule in Samoan Protestant churches today.

The covenant and its obligations are not confined to the pastor but also extend to his wife. As a *faletua*, she must behave in an honourable way together with their children. If the pastor, his wife, or even their children act in ways unbecoming of their status, the covenant is broken and the pastor would be required to leave the village. Children of pastors are thus governed by the same principles of the covenant. As such, they are tabooed from courting within the village. If, for example, a son of a pastor is found in a sexual relation with a village girl or she becomes pregnant, this would ultimately lead to the pastor and his family leaving the village. The same holds true if a daughter of the pastor is proven to have had sexual relations with a boy in the village. This is because, like the brother–sister relationship, the relationship between the pastor, his family, and the village is grounded in the incest taboo (Tuimaleali'ifano 2000). Any sexual relations between these two parties are therefore seen as incestuous and greatly condemned. In some ways, the very idea and value of virginity that once applied to women as sisters were transposed collectively onto the pastor and his family. As mentioned, sisters are obligated to maintain their virginity to honour their brothers and the family. Similarly, the pastor and his family are obligated to honour the village by maintaining a high standard of sexual morality and purity. Here we see a convergence between Christianity and the ideals of the *feagaiga*.

As the attributes of the *feagaiga* were transposed onto pastors, they took on the roles of sacred priests, both mediating and redeeming on behalf of the village. This newly formed covenant not only protected the power of the council of chiefs but also led to the demise of women's sacred power. The interplay between sacred and secular, which once suffused the relationship between brothers and sisters, has now shifted to that between the pastoral couple and the village. How then did this impact on Samoan women who once held this sacred status?

CHRISTIANITY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE *FEAGAIGA*

The impact of Christianity on the status and valuation of Samoan women has been analysed by various scholars (Gunson 1987; Dunlop 1998; Schoeffel 1975, 1979, 1995; Tcherkézoff and

Douaire-Marsaudon 2008b). These scholars have argued that conversion to Christianity had drastic consequences on the status of Samoan women. LMS missionaries abhorred what they considered to be the low and degrading state of Samoan women. Their involvement in customs associated with sexuality, such as the cult of virginity, polygamy, and arranged marriage, was seen as demeaning, undignified, and contrary to Christian morals and beliefs. Missionaries thus set out to abolish these practices and promoted monogamous ideas of marriage, which they earnestly believed would uplift the status of women. What they apparently did not recognise, however, was that these indigenous practices gave Samoan women much power and influence, particularly as sisters or *feagaiga* within the social organisation of the *aualuma*. They were vital in the transmission of rank and the extension of the political alliances of villages and their high chiefs (Gunson 1987; Schoeffel and Daws 1987).

It has been argued that missionaries imposed their own models of gender upon Samoan women based on Victorian ideals that promoted the roles of women as maternal and domestic (Gunson 1987; Schoeffel 1975, 1979, 1995). These ideals were portrayed by the wives of missionaries who allegedly served as the perfect role models of the ideal woman to be emulated by their local counterparts. The homes of missionaries became the 'object lesson' where local women observed and learned from the missionary wife as she performed her domestic duties. Later, boarding schools were established where girls were taught domestic skills in order to become proper Christian wives and mothers (Small 1967). Yet, even in promoting this ideal of women as domestic and maternal, missionaries continued to undermine the status of women as *feagaiga* both within their kin and village.

The introduction of women's fellowships by missionaries and health committees by the New Zealand Colonial Administration in the 1920s further perpetuated this emphasis (Dunlop 1998; Tcherkézoff and Douaire-Marsaudon 2008b). Such groups, which were often led by the wives of pastors and chiefs, amalgamated all women in local villages, blurring the distinction between women as *feagaiga* and those who were married into the village or *nofotane*. This promoted a novel social binary between the sexes, where all women were grouped together on one side and all men on the other, despite their differences in rank and status. The introduction of the pastoral couple into the village continued to further reinscribe this gendered binary. Indeed, the pastoral couple became the ideal model of a monogamous, nuclear family to which all families in the village should aspire.

The impact of this gendered binary based on the husband–wife relationship has had a major impact on the status of women as sisters and in their social organisation of the *aualuma*. Women who are married into the village are now taking more prominent roles in the village. In a church women's fellowship or health committee, for example, wives of chiefs are now taking leadership roles, which in the past were largely the domain of sisters of village chiefs. This is made possible by the amalgamation of all women in the village through the church, led by the wife of the pastor. Although in some villages there is still an effort to distinguish the *aualuma* from wives, the success of women's fellowships in Samoa means that the power and influence of sisters are gradually being eclipsed by that of their brothers' wives.

Overall, scholars generally agree that Christianity has had a negative effect on the status and valuation of Samoan women. Once the practices and institutions that gave women much power were destabilised by missionaries, their influence as *feagaiga* was weakened, while their status as wives was emphasised. For women as sisters, this decline in power was not only political but sacred. Under the missionary dispensation, the old role of sacred sister or *feagaiga* was replaced by that of a sacred pastor. This shift meant that women's sacred status under the new order was devalued while the new figure of the pastor's sacred power was enhanced. This had a far-reaching impact on women, as their sacred power was paramount in their ability to influence and manipulate political power. In Samoa, it was through women that cosmological justification of rank and power was legitimated (Gunson 1987; Schoeffel and

Daws 1987). And in a society like Samoa where sanctity permeated all aspects of life, rather than being relegated to the sphere of religion, the power of women, once very substantial, gradually declined. Thus, the missionaries' emphasis on the role of woman as domestic and maternal is largely blamed for the devaluation of the status of women as 'merely' wives.

A RESURGENCE OF THE *FEAGAIGA?*

This 'domestication' thesis propounded by many scholars was certainly true to a large extent and the impact of Christianity overall had negative consequences on the status of Samoan women as *feagaiga*. However, this theory has its limits. 'Domestication', perhaps inadvertently and paradoxically, also had positive effects on Samoan women. Although missionaries emphasised the domestic maternal role of women, there were paradoxes in that the lives of missionary wives, both in Samoa and throughout the Pacific, rarely realised the ideal (Grimshaw 1989; Huber and Lutkehaus 1999; Langmore 1989). For Samoa, I have recently contested the portrayal of missionary wives as the embodiments of idealised domestic mothers and wives (Latai 2014). Such individuals were not always the perfect role models promoted in missionary texts and local sermons. Many, for example, sent their children back to England while others employed local nannies and servants to care for their children and to look after their domestic duties. As the wives of missionaries taught Samoan women how to become 'proper' wives to their husbands and mothers to their children, missionary wives were living very different lives, often as full-time teachers. This paradox continued with the establishment of more formal education for Samoan girls at Papauta Girls School in 1892. This boarding school for girls was envisioned as a place where Samoan girls were to be moulded into ideal wives and mothers. Paradoxically, the school was run by single missionary women who were independent and worked professionally as full-time teachers. Papauta also introduced 'feminized' professions such as teaching, nursing, and secretarial work for the first time in Samoa, thus, ushering in a novel figure of woman – one who was able to have a career, earn a living of her own, and work largely in the public sphere. Hence, as this institution continued to emphasise woman in the domestic sphere, it is a contradiction that they were simultaneously exemplifying a very different model of womanhood. The paradoxes inherent in the lives of missionaries and the internal contradictions in the project to transform Samoan women are therefore important in re-evaluating the 'domestication' thesis. Moreover, other crucial factors must be taken into consideration when assessing the impact of the Christian chimera of 'domesticity' on the status of Samoan women. Missionaries often faced local context limitations and their domestic ideals were invariably confounded in the mission field (Latai 2014).

There was also a profound shift in the roles of Samoan women in the twentieth century as Samoa was transformed by capitalism. The introduction of a capitalist economy meant that new ideas were being introduced, which transformed indigenous concepts about the roles of men and women. Money was now seen as a new way to acquire wealth and to provide for one's family. Initially, this was mainly the role of men as brothers, but today women, through their ability to earn an income, are equally capable providers for their families. This was a significant change in terms of the concept of *tautua* or service. Previously, heirs to family titles were judged on their *tautua* to the family. If brothers performed well, their selection for titles was guaranteed. However, the influence of capitalism has widened the concept of *tautua* to include one's ability to have a high education, hold a highly paid job, or attain a respectable position in government (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009; Macpherson and Macpherson 2009; Schoeffel 1995; Tcherkézoff and Douaire-Marsaudon 2008b). Women who have been able to meet these novel criteria are now more likely to hold chiefly titles. Hence, sisters who once relinquished their rights to chiefly titles out of respect for their brothers are increasingly taking on chiefly titles.

Moreover, the influence of capitalism on the selection of holders of chiefly titles means a shift from titles based on the reciprocal relationship of *feagaiga* to being a property or achievement of individuals – from a more relational quality judged through service to a more individualised one, of having a high education or a highly paid job. This more individualised notion of achievement and ownership has in effect extended the idea that chiefs can claim sole rights to family properties like titles and land. Chiefs are supposed to be guardians of family assets on behalf of all members of the extended family (Aiono Le Tagaloa 1986, 1992). However, this concept is eroding as individual chiefs are laying claims to land and titles as their 'property'. The increasing claim of women to chiefly titles therefore could be attributed to their attempt to safeguard their rights to such properties. As Peggy Dunlop argues, the *feagaiga* was a tenuous foundation on which to claim rights; furthermore, it served to discourage women from activating their rights, because to do so implied that their brothers were not fulfilling their role of protecting their sisters (Dunlop 1998). This shift to a focus on rights and property suggests that the once sacred covenant between brothers and sisters, which imaged a relationship based on complementarity and relationality, is slowly fading away and emerging as a more oppositional and competitive relationship.

By the mid-twentieth century, the meaning of the term *feagaiga* itself had come to refer to contractual agreements between parties. This is seen in the translation given by George Milner in 1966, in which he emphasised the contractual aspects of the term as an agreement, treaty, or contract (Milner 1966). This meaning is now widely evoked in contemporary Samoa. Thus, over the years, the original meaning of *feagaiga* as an established and special relationship, whereby brothers and sisters play complementary roles, has shifted to one of oppositional conflict. Moreover, with the influence of capitalism and western notions of the person as more individualised, these social relationships have become unequal and competitive, creating a greater emphasis on the individual rather than the collective.

The gradual rise in the number of chiefly women has several implications, which are now confronting Samoans not just in the family but also in the social organisation of the village. As the institution of the *aualuma* has declined, women with chiefly titles are now slowly entering the village council of chiefs. For many Samoan women today, this is an extremely difficult position. This is because female chiefs who are now entering the council are in fact entering into the sphere of their brothers. Hence at this level, the brother–sister separation has been bridged by this mingling of females and males in the council. Women chiefs have expressed their discomfort when sitting in the council.[10] This is because the *feagaiga* relationship dictates that brothers and sisters must show utmost respect when they are in the presence of one another. Hence, no indecent conversations may be carried out and there is a taboo on discussing everything sexual. However, this is difficult when serious issues are being discussed in which the severity and even the directness of the language used make women feel extremely uncomfortable. Discussions of sexual issues are even more difficult, as this is strictly tabooed in the brother–sister relation. Hence, some have seen this intrusion as breaking the once sacred covenant between brothers and sisters. As a result, some villages have resorted to banning women from holding chiefly titles, seeing the mixture of male and female chiefs in the council as breaking traditional taboos between brothers and sisters.[11]

Samoan women are thus left in a very precarious position. They have claimed their rights to chiefly status, which has always been possible because of the dynamic nature of Samoan culture. However, the prevailing values of the *feagaiga* in the brother–sister relationship continue to make this shift uncomfortable for them. Samoans today continue to be nostalgic about the powerful status of women as *feagaiga* in the *aualuma* even when in reality, this power is largely a thing of the past. Thus, while women seek to reassert their influence in the political sphere, they are continually pushed back by traditional ideals that once orchestrated gender and social relations.

The introduction of the current form of national governance in Samoa since independence in 1962, based on the Westminster model and ideals of democracy, has further complicated the situation of women. Since its inception, the Westminster model has been modified through integration with the Samoan *faamatai* or chiefly system of governance. Elected members of parliament must be holders of chiefly titles. Because women at the time held no chiefly titles, the introduction of this form of central government meant that women were largely left out of the national political arena (Huffer and So'o 2000; Tcherkézoff 2000). Over the years, a few women who have been able to hold chiefly titles have managed to enter national politics. However, the central government in Samoa today is still predominantly male. What is interesting, however, is the attempt by the current government to give more seats to women in parliament in order to have gender balance. These attempts are being hampered by voices at the local level where women are being discouraged from holding chiefly titles.

Similar developments are facing women in the churches today as outside pressure from global Christian bodies is being exerted on local churches in Samoa to ordain women. A small group of local women is claiming their rights to be ministers of the church. But such a move is proving difficult for Samoans to accept. Samoa is perhaps one of the few countries in the Pacific where women are not ordained in Protestant churches. In 2012, the issue of the ordination of Samoan women made headline news in the local newspapers. A Samoan woman, who is ordained into the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, had married a minister of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS) a few years earlier. Since then, they had looked after a CCCS parish in Auckland. However, on 22 February 2012, she was appointed by the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand to serve at a Pacific Island Presbyterian Church in Auckland. As a result, the Elders of the CCCS in Samoa called for the resignation of both the minister and his reverend wife, and that the *feagaiga* between the pastor and his parish be broken on the basis that this is unconstitutional and not in line with Samoan protocol. According to the spokesperson of the CCCS and quoted in the *Samoa Observer*:

> This ban is not because we do not want . . . [her] to work. . . . It's because . . . [she] does not want to be a faletua (wife of a pastor), and as such, it means she's not there on Sundays to do a faletua's work as stipulated under our denomination's service.[12]

This particular case reflects how the once successful integration of the pastoral couple into the village congregation is now being challenged. The concept of *feagaiga*, which was once transposed onto the pastor and his wife, the *faletua*, has become the cultural norm – their roles are complementary and as a couple they have the same obligations as the *feagaiga*. The wife as the *faletua* is a central figure in the *feagaiga* and plays a crucial role in dealing with women in the village. The ordination of women has been viewed by the church as disrupting this vital relationship between the pastoral couple and the village and their appropriate spheres of activities. The ordination of women will thus require a new way of reconfiguring these relationships within local villages. A commonly expressed concern among Samoans is 'What happens to the husband if the wife is a pastor in a village?' What is interesting in contemporary Samoa is that, even if women are ordained, the likelihood of their working as pastors in villages is very slim. In the church, therefore, we see the continuing emphasis on the husband–wife relationship as exemplified in the pastoral couple and the decline in the value of the brother–sister relationship.

The situation for women in Samoa today continues to be complex. Their current claim for equal power within both the political and religious spheres in Samoa is somehow being hampered by the prevailing values of the *feagaiga*, not only of the brother–sister relationship but that between the pastoral couple and the village congregation. Hence, women continue to be caught in an unfortunate position whereby, for the time being, both political and religious power continues to elude them.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I set out to explore how in the process of Christian conversion, the indigenous sacred covenant between brother and sister was transposed onto the relationship between the pastor and the congregation. In the case of Samoa, we have seen the negative impact of both Christianity and capitalism on the status and valuation of Samoan women. The special *feagaiga* relationship between brother and sister that denoted encompassment and mutual respect for the other was transposed into an equally special relationship between the pastoral family and the villagers, thereby weakening the spiritual power and authority of Samoan women. The weakening of women's power and authority is often true of the colonial process not only in Samoa but throughout the Pacific where women are often at the forefront of colonial transformation and often bear the brunt of the consequences of change. However, we have also seen in Samoa the agency of women in contesting foreign forces that have undermined their status.

Women have continued to negotiate and adapt to new challenges, recreating themselves in new ways in an often competitive masculine world. This is seen in the way Samoan women have slowly taken up their rights to political power, by exercising their traditional rights to chiefly titles. This movement is supported by the success of women in education and the promotion of ideals of capitalism and democracy by national government. It is also seen in the religious sphere where women are now proclaiming their rights to be ordained as pastors, thus seeing a potential return of women to positions of divine authority. What remains to be seen is the impact this will have on the *feagaiga* relationship between the pastoral couple and the village congregation, and, more significantly, the impact of these women's movements on the emergence of more individuated and competitive modes of personhood, both in the political and religious spheres in Samoa.

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NOTES

1. *O le Sulu Samoa* was first published by the LMS in 1839. This is one of the earliest texts in Samoan and was used as way to explain biblical stories and to introduce Samoans to the teachings of the new religion.
2. It must be noted that as a sister is to her brother, so is a female descent line (*tamafafine*) to a male descent line (*tamatane*). So every Samoan descent group contains two categories of kin; the *tamafafine* and the *tamatane*. Both *tamafafine* and *tamatane* groups comprise female and male members, who should treat one another as though they were sister and brother, respectively.
3. According to Robert Louis Stevenson, young women often marched in front of their fathers and brothers during war, and they were not allowed to be killed (see Stevenson 1892:11).
4. Malietoa Vainuupo, the most powerful paramount chief in Samoa at the time officially welcomed Christianity in 1830. When he died in 1841, he relinquished all his paramount titles and gave his honorific title of *susuga* as well as *ao o faalupega* to the pastor. These titles were high honours, which led to the increasing high status of the pastor in Samoan society.
5. The *Samoan Reporter*, a biannual magazine published by the LMS in Samoa since 1845, gave regular reports of annual contributions made by Samoan villages for the welfare of their Samoan pastors. These included cash, *siapo* or tapa, food, *etc*.
6. The traditional act of *ifoga* or public apology occurs when someone commits a serious offence. In this act, the culprit's family will proceed to the family of the victim where they would sit outside in front of the victim's

house. The culprit or an elderly sister or *feagaiga* is then covered with an *ietoga*. If the victim's family accepts the apology, they will uncover the *ietoga* and welcome them inside, thus proper reconciliation occurs.

7. This is based on my experience as a pastor's son growing up in the villages where my parents worked from the 1970s to the 1980s.
8. The two main Protestant churches in Samoa today are the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa or CCCS (formerly the LMS Mission Church) and the Methodist Church. Although the concept of *feagaiga* was first applied to CCCS church ministers, they are also adopted by Methodist ministers as well as ministers in other denominations except the Roman Catholic Church.
9. According to Aiono Le Tagaloa, *faletua* has been translated by Samoan feminists to mean 'back of the house' as that is its surface literal translation: *fale* means dwelling and *tua* means back. Yet the real meaning of the term according to Aiono Fanaafi is 'the adviser that the house depends on; the backing which a *matai* finds difficult to do without' (see Aiono Le Tagaloa *n.d.*).
10. This is based on several interviews with current female chiefs in Samoa.
11. This is now the case in my own village. The few women who are currently holders of chiefly titles are still acknowledged but they will be the last ones as any bestowal of titles on women is banned from now on.
12. CCCS Minister to be removed, *Samoan Observer*, 21 March 2012.

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