WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING

IN SAMOA

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You taught me the greatest values of life. You showed me how to be the best and greatest eldest daughter, a sister and a wife one day. You taught me how to carry myself as a tamaitai Samoa. You taught me the values of dignity, humility and respect. You taught me to be bold and fear God, to be independent and most of all to understand the true value and true attributes of a tamasa/sacred child, a feagaiga/sister and a suli/family heir.

In my life's journey, I am forever asking myself whether I am living or being true to the teachings you taught me. I dedicate this thesis to you my dearest parents:

the late Umufaiesea Leifi Seumatumua Fatalevave Iaepa Motusaga Ese and my dearest mother Leaso Ualesi Motusaga.

Mum if it wasn't for your endless prayers I would not have survived my PhD journey. I am who I am today because of your hard work. I hope the discussion in this thesis reflects your hard work in trying to mould me to be a true tamaitai Samoa.
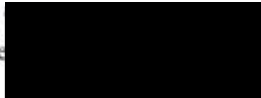
ABSTRACT

The issue of the unequal participation of women in parliament and public decision-making is a global problem and of particular concern in the Pacific region. Various international conventions and national frameworks have been established to address this problem, alongside initiatives by non-government organisations. However, in Samoa, the question of women's political participation is a complex one. According to deeply held Samoan cultural principles (*faasamoa*), both men and women have equal rights to family resources, including rights to land and the right to become a family chief (*matai*). As different scholars have noted, there is also a wide cultural belief that women are equal to men and that there is no inequality between the genders. Nonetheless, of the fifty parliamentary seats in the Samoan Parliament, only five are held by women of which one was created simply in order to meet the 10% quota.

This thesis examines the contradiction between this ideology of equality in Samoa and the reality of women's low participation rates in politics. To date, there has been no thorough investigation of this contradiction in the Samoan context. By interviewing cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, village chiefs (*matais*), leaders in the non-government and private sectors and women in the community and church, this thesis provides a unique insight into current perceptions about the status of women in Samoa. It looks at the negative impact of colonialism and Christianity. Policy analysis and feminist and ethnographic approaches, such as participant observation, have also been employed to identify factors either constraining or encouraging women's participation in parliament and the public domain in Samoa. The thesis argues that, in order to understand and improve the contradictory status of women in Samoa today, more attention needs to be paid to the *faasamoa* and the traditional beliefs that could be used to enhance women's participation, particularly the value of women as the sister (*feagaiga*) and sacred child (*tamasa*). This requires a genuinely collaborative, long-term process that acknowledges local and micro political settings, not just the establishment of universal goals and targets.

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Declaration

I, Mema Motusaga, declare that the PhD thesis entitled "Women in Decision Making in Samoa" is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work".

Signature ████████████████   Date: 30 / 8 / 16

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight (*Proverbs 3:5 – 6*).

In my first week of University I was told to attend the orientation program for newly enrolled PhD students. On the day, two final year PhD students (one from overseas, one a fellow Australian) were guest speakers. They shared with us their experiences from social and academic life, how to utilise all the resources available at Victoria University and how to make the four years enjoyable and memorable. The guest speaker's message, '*A PhD can be a very lonely journey and experience if you keep to yourself*' was a hidden riddle that I couldn't make sense of that day. This four years has not been an easy time for me and without the continuous support and help of the many people below, the guest speaker's words at my orientation program would have been true.

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The thesis has been copy-edited and proof-read by Lee Miller, MA, AM (Harvard), MBA, Principal Editor at Edit Mode, whose services are consistent with those outlined in Standards D and E of the Australian Standards for Editing Practice (ASEP).

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
EU	European Union
IPU	Inter Parliamentary Union
LMS	London Missionary Society
MWCSD	Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development
NGO	Non-government organisation
UNCEDAWC	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women Committee
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations

GLOSSARY

alofa	love
aiga	family
aiga potopoto	extended family
agaifanua	custom specific to a village
alii	paramount chief
alii ma faipule	council of chiefs
aumaga	untitled men (but associated with the chiefly title)
E tele aa o le tagata pei o aa o le laau	A person has many roots (many relatives and family connections) just like the roots of a tree
E mu mata o le tama tane i lona tuafafine	The brother's face burns for his sister
E o faatasi le aganuu ma le faakerisiano	Culture goes hand in hand with Christianity
ifoga	traditional apology
ietoga	fine mat
O au o le Tamaitai Samoa	I am a Samoan woman.
O le Feagaiga Tausi	I am the Covenant.
O le Suli	I am the family heir.
O Samoa ua uma ona tofi	Samoa is already structured
O le ioimata o le tuagane lona tuafafine	The sister is the pupil of the brother's eye
O le ala i le pule o le tautua	The pathway to leadership is through service
O uo mo aso uma ao uso mo aso vale	You have your friends everyday but your sister or brother will stand by you no matter what.
Upega o Filiga	Net/snare used to catch pigeons. Used in this study as a metaphor explaining the difficult process a researcher has to go

	through in deciding the appropriate method and conceptual framework for a study.
ua pa le lagi	the sky burst
Ua taoto ae o se alaoo	Its like a well designed, well structured pathway that takes you to the end.
faanuupo	living in a dark age
faasamoa	the Samoan way
faalupega	honorific salutation
faamatai	chiefly system
faiganuu	village governance and politics
fanua	land
faaaloalo	respect
faautauta	being careful
feagaiga	covenant
fafine	married woman
faioa	producer of wealth
faafeagaiga	pastor/ordained church minister
fala moe	sleeping mat
loto foai	giving heart
laoa	name of the talking chief's house
matai	chief
mana	sacred power
Mafutaga a Tina	Women's group within the church
nuu	village
papalagi	European person
pule	power
pae ma le auli	shell and iron
Sama se Mago, fili i le tai se agavaa	Metaphor symbolising the process of choosing the most appropriate person for a chiefly title
soalaupule	consensus
sao	family's paramount chief
suafa	title
saoao ma tamaitai	daughters of the village

suli	family heir
Solo o le Va	Chant of space
siapo	tapa
tulaga maota	house site
tulafale	talking chief
tamaitai matua	leading female descendant in the society or among village women associated with the title.
Tafatolu o le Tofamanino	three spheres of the Samoan philosophical view of existence
taalolo	traditional process of gift presentation
tala o le foafoaga	the story of Creation
tagata	man/person
tofiga	position in society
tamaitai	unmarried Samoan woman
tapu	taboo
tausala	payment for wrongdoing. Another context refers to the role of the woman as the one who pays the price
tamasa	sacred child
va	relational space between people
va fealoai	respectful space
va fesootai	connecting space
va fetufaai	sharing space
va tapuia	sacred space
va fefaasoaai	consultative space
taupou	ceremonial virgin title
Va o le tuagane ma le tuafafine	relational space between the sister and the brother
Va o le Matai ma lona aiga	relational space between the chief and his family members

INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental problems facing the process of democratisation is the continued lack of gender equality in political leadership around the world. Women worldwide represent only one in seven parliamentarians, one in ten cabinet ministers and one in twenty Heads of State or Government (IPU 2000, UN 2000). Multiple factors have contributed towards the under-representation of women including social, structural, economic and institutional barriers. Norris and Inglehart (2004) in their paper 'Cultural Barriers to Women's Leadership: A Worldwide Comparison' argue that there are substantial differences in attitudes towards women's leadership in post-industrial, post-communist and developing societies. Not only that but the two authors claim that traditional attitudes and culture have proven to be barriers to women getting into parliament.

In Samoa, a small developing island country of the Polynesian group in the South Pacific, there is a widely held belief that gender inequality doesn't exist in Samoa and that women are as equal as their male counterparts. According to the Samoans, women occupy higher or more prestigious positions in their own families, communities and the country as a whole (Ministry of Women 2001). Fairbairn-Dunlop (1996) in her book *Tamatai Samoa: Their Stories* supports the same argument by explaining that, in the *faasamoa*/Samoan culture, the chiefly rule, based on a system of rights and obligations, guarantees all family members shared equal rights to family resources, including rights to land and to be a family chief *(matai)*. Further to Fairbairn-Dunlop's view, Meleisea (1987) and Maliko (1998) point out that sisters/*saoao* are the most highly valued status group in the village and that they hold and transmit *mana*/sacred power. The relationship between the sisters and their brothers is bound in a sacred covenant called *feagaiga*, where the brother is to serve and protect the sister no matter what. According to Fairbairn-Dunlop, women's position as *feagaiga* guarantees women equal rights with their brothers. The sisters are given the title of *taupou* (ceremonial virgin), the Samoan feminine status equivalent to the chiefly titles bestowed upon the brothers. These ascribed statuses come with assigned responsibilities, where women, according to Tagaloa (1997), are known as the healer, teacher, the priestess, maker of wealth and the

peacemaker. By contrast, men are the protector, the decision maker and the spokesperson for the family and are responsible for all the heavy duties such as cultivating the land, building, and being warriors.

Despite the arguments by these Samoan authors and the fact that Samoan women are the cornerstone of families and communities, research shows that women still lag behind in critical areas such as representation in parliament and high-level decision making. The reality of women's representation in parliament contradicts the Samoan ideology that there is no inequality in Samoa. This under-representation had been confirmed and well-illustrated in Samoa's five periodic reports on the Status of Women in Samoa, presented to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women Committee (UNCEDAWC). In these reports, the government of Samoa reported to the UNCEDAWC that since Samoa's ratification of the Convention in 1992 much has been done to accelerate the development of women and that Samoa had made progress in all areas except for the acceleration of equality between men and women (Ministry of Women 2009b, p. 19).

Both the *National Policy for Women of Samoa 2010-2015* (Ministry of Women 2009a) and the draft *Gender Equality Policy 2016-2021* make reference to the increased participation of women in public life and decision making as one of the most critical areas for enhancing the development of women. Further clarification of the under-representation of women in politics was made by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD) in a number of public presentations where it indicated that, even though women in Samoa are in high positions in government and non-governmental organisations as well as in the private sector, their numbers are still well below that of their male counterparts. For instance, of the fifty seats of Parliament only five are held by women. Of the fourteen members of cabinet, only two are women. Across the 54 Government Ministries, Government Corporations and Constitutional Authorities, since 2015 only 17 women as compared to 31 men have been appointed a Chief Executive Officer or General Manager. The members of public boards are 19% female and 81% male. Furthermore only registered holders of chiefly titles may stand for elections and women only make up an estimated 10.5% of the total chiefly title holders in Samoa. Most villages have women's committees which play a major practical role in

village development but, importantly, they are not in a decision-making role (Apelu 2011, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development 2011).

Norris and Inglehart (2004) pinpoint traditional attitudes and culture as barriers that maintain the very low number of women in all levels of decision making and in particular in parliament. Ballington and Karam (2005) in a revised edition of the handbook *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers* argue that the factors hampering or facilitating women's political participation vary with the level of socioeconomic development, geography, culture and the type of political system a country chooses. Women themselves are not a homogenous group and there are major differences between them, based on class, race, ethnicity, cultural background and education (p. 33).

On the other hand, Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon(2008) in their study 'A Research Note on the Relationship between Development, Democracy and Women's Political Representation' point out that in trying to answer the question of women's low representation in politics, previous studies used different models which best fit the interests of the wealthy or developed nations but fail to identify factors which promote women's political representation in developing countries. The theoretical models used in Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon's (2008) study include a comparison of two types of variable: the variables of interest and the independent variables. The independent variables, according to Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon, are grouped into political factors (the electoral system, timing of women's suffrage, degree of democracy, leftist government), socioeconomic factors (women's educational attainment, women's labour force participation, women in professional occupations, strength of the women's movement, economic development) and cultural factors (religious tradition, ratification of CEDAW, legalisation of abortion and geographic region). If this is the case, then Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon (2008) see a real need for new theoretical models which can better identify the factors limiting women's political representation in developing countries.

The above studies demonstrate that the question of women's under-representation and participation in parliament in other parts of the world as well as in the Melanesian parts of the Pacific region has been researched and debated. However similar research has not

been done for Samoa. This study will address that gap in the literature by looking specifically at an investigation of the low representation and participation of women in public life and parliament in Samoa, where Samoa is categorised as a developing country and as a small island state in the South Pacific region. The study will build on Wallace's (2011) and Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon's (2008) work with an emphasis on the role of cultural factors in constraining or encouraging the political representation and participation of women. Unlike Wallace's and Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon's studies, this investigation will employ afeminist ethnographic approach as well as community development perspectives to guide the investigation. The aim is to find out what the cultural factors are which promote or constrain women's political representation and participation in Samoa; to identify the role of the different actors such as government and non-government organisations in promoting women's political representation; and to identify a suitable theoretical model that will best explain women's political representation in a developing nation like Samoa.

Eventhough the literature on feminism locates and acknowledges different cultures, the discussion is dominated by cultures which have oppressed women. There is very little focus on cultures that acknowledge and embrace their women. This thesis speaks to a culture that does acknowledge and embrace women as equal participants in the political process along with their male counterparts. However the unequal number of women in Samoan politics is because in practice there are not many women with chiefly titles within families and villages. Hence the need to address that issue before resolving the issue of the unequal number of women in parliament. It is clear from research with participants in this study that Samoan women in their role as the *feagaiga*/sister or the *tamasa*/sacred child understand that, as family heirs, they have equal rights to family resources such as family chiefly titles and family lands. However most often the women's decisions to forego the rights to which they are entitled through their family's honour and position, their right to become family chief and through this their right to participate in Samoan politics, are based on factors such as their mutual respect for their brothers arising from the sister and brother covenantal relationship/*feagaiga* concept and different personal priorities. From this comes the need to thoroughly understand the covenantal relationship/*feagaiga* concept and the different responsibilities of both genders within this relationship agreement, in order to be able to contextualise the Samoan cultural ideology on women's participation in politics and to understand why

there are not that many women chiefs and as a consequence why there are not that many women in Samoan politics.

This thesis reinforces the conclusions reached by Ballington and Karam (2005), Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon (2008), and Wallace (2011), that there is the need to thoroughly investigate factors like the level of socioeconomic development, geography, culture and the type of political system a country chooses in order to understand fully the level of women's representation and participation in political life. However the context from one country or region cannot be taken as the universal situation. As Mohanty (2003a) says: 'In this context, I ask what would it mean to be attentive to the micropolitics of everyday life as well as to the larger processes that recolonise the culture and identities of people across the globe. How we think of the local in/of the global and vice versa without falling into colonising or cultural relativist platitudes about difference is crucial in this intellectual and political landscape. And for me, this kind of thinking is tied to a revised race-and-gender-conscious historical materialism.' (pp. 508 – 509) All of these aspects and their impact on the role of women in decision-making in Samoa are discussed in detail in the individual chapters of the thesis.

This study argues that the Samoan culture/*faasamoa* doesn't discriminate against women attaining status as family heirs and from getting into parliament through this status. However the Samoan ideology of equality has been influenced through the years by various factors such as globalisation, Christianity, level of socioeconomic development, and the type of political system Samoa has chosen. Another key factor arises from within *faasamoa* itself. The Samoan concept of *feagaiga* is the covenantal relationship between sister and brother which defines the commitment and responsibilities of both sister and brother to each other. The study uses a thorough assessment and analysis of *feagaiga* to better understand the Samoan context around women's political representation.

Chapter One provides a discussion of the existing literature from around the world, from the Pacific region and from Samoa on the political representation of women and identifies how this study will work towards filling some of the gaps within the existing literature.

Chapter Two speaks directly to the methodology and research tools chosen to collect the data needed to formulate the study's arguments.

In Chapter Three the thesis discusses the status of a woman within the *faasamoa*, It considers who Samoan women are from a cultural perspective and explains the culture behind the Samoan ideology that women are as equal as their male counterparts.Eventhough most of the writings on feminism locate and acknowledge different cultures, their writers are focussed on those cultures which have oppressed women, and there is seldom mention of a culture that actually acknowledges and embraces its women. The discussion in this chapter shows Samoa as an example of a culture that provides equal access and equal rights for both men and women. The study participants reaffirm this by acknowledging that they know and understand that the opportunity exists for Samoan women to participate in politics or decision-making processes. The question for this thesis is to what extent this opportunity is reflected in the final decisions made by the women themselves and what other factors are in play.

Chapter Four concentrates on the impact of Christianity on women's political representation and on the traditional concept of *feagaiga*. It looks at how Christianity has affected the contemporary view of who Samoan women really are from a cultural perspective. The discussion in this chapter looks into how Christianity as an adopted culture has negatively changed the traditional value that the *faasamoa* placed on the women as the *feagaiga*/sister. It argues that Christianity downplayed the status of the Samoan woman as the *feagaiga*/sister and the sacred child, and instead promoted the woman's role as the mother and dutiful wife. After consideration of a range of different perspectives this chapter shows that Christianity was not the only tool of colonisation in the history of countries like Samoa. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed to have been one of the most effective and active tools for colonising such societies. Christianity is to be partly blamed for the poor political representation of Samoan women because it degraded the value of the woman as the *feagaiga*/sister in the public domain while encouraging the maternal and domestic roles in the private sphere. This had a drastic influence not only on Samoan society itself but also on Samoan women and their position within that society. The chapter argues that the principal traditional processes, whether in the family or the *faamatai,* have been influenced by different perceptions and understanding of the *faasamoa*, especially in regards to the equality of men and

women; by personal ego; by different misconceptions and misinterpretations of key cultural concepts; by Christianity; and by men's decisions in support of their own interests. All these factors have impacted adversely on women's full ability to participate equally in all sectors of society. These changed perceptions have affected women themselves and Samoan society's expectations of women. If the Samoans had been able to sustain the ideal values from the past that underpin these processes, there would not have been any struggle for women today. The saying *'Sama se mago, fili i le tai se agavaa'* will also be examined as part of this discussion.

Chapter Five looks at how the processes a Samoan woman goes through in order to get into parliament differ from those for a woman in Europe, New Zealand or Australia. It discusses the election process at local level (the village level decision-making process) and how it connects with the larger electoral system. It is evident that in contrast to women in other parts of the world, in order for Samoan women to get into politics they first have to go through processes at the family level and at the village level. These processes have been influenced by factors such as Christianity, changes overtime in the relationships and dynamics of power, and the impact of societal change in areas such as higher education and distribution of wealth which has affected the perceptions, intent, decisions and actions of the individuals involved. A final consideration is the effort to be in touch and to keep up to date with what's happening in the entire globe. This has resulted in the adoption of some regulations or frameworks which may not be relevant to the Samoan cultural context.

All of these factors have had or may have negative or positive implications for the role of women in decision making in Samoa. Negative influences can be unpacked and debated so that opportunities can be created to better enhance the full participation of Samoan women in politics. Positive influences can be built on to enlarge and expand the scope of positive developments for a more holistic approach. The chapter starts from the premise that no culture is better than another; no systems are greater than any others. Globalisation and social change do not happen overnight but are rather a process over time. Samoa needs to participate in global change but also needs to be more vigilant in keeping Samoan customs and traditions.

The final chapter, Chapter Six, looks at the impact of some of the international agreements and national frameworks adopted by Samoa. A key example is the UN's Convention on Eliminating all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It considers their effectiveness in increasing the political participation of women in politics and their impact on the status of women as the *feagaiga*/sister, *tamasa/*sacred child in the Samoan cultural context. This particular chapter uses the input provided by the twenty-one Samoans who participated in this study and focuses on the difficulties involved in balancing the participation of both genders in politics in ways that meet the aims and expectations of the Samoan government, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the international community. It includes an overview of how successful the Samoan government and other Samoan institutions have been in promoting a rights based approach in accordance with international frameworks such CEDAW and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The focus is on the extent to which these international frameworks, while promoting women's rights in general and women's participation in politics in particular, either contradict, challenge or support Samoan cultural ideals. This chapter also considers other aspects of colonialism - the introduced monetary system and the adopted laws based on foreign cultural practices - that have influenced the Samoan family system and that disadvantage women from getting into politics.

The Conclusion picks up core themes from across the thesis. Recognition and harnessing of women's active participation in local level politics will generate a greater level of acceptance of women's political participation at the national and international level. It is important to note that government, non-government organisations and the international community often overlook the fact that achieving gender equality, whether in decision-making positions or in other areas, requires time and genuine collaboration, not just establishing universal goals and targets. Attention must be paid to micro-level politics and the complex interactions of different cultural contexts if women's participation in decision making in Samoa is to increase and be accepted and embraced.

CHAPTER 1
LITERATURE REVIEW

.........cross-cultural feminist work must be attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes (Mohanty 2003a, p. 501)

Women's participation rates in parliaments within the Pacific are among the lowest in the world. While women's representation within the Pacific region fluctuates, it is well behind the global average figure of around twenty percent and the commonly accepted target of 30 percent (Burain 2014). The percentage stated is a clear indication that the Pacific region must make progress in this area. The Women's Parliamentary Partnership in their submission to the Pacific Plan review in 2003 stated that there has been little positive change in women's political representation in the Pacific region in the past decade. In addition, in the Partnership's view, the increase in women's participation in democratic processes at both central and local government levels is crucial for the development and sustainability of democracy. They suggest that the systemic, institutional and cultural barriers inhibiting women's participation must be removed if gender equality in the Pacific region is to be achieved (Burain 2014).

Women are often invisible in anthropological studies of politics, which is assumed to be a male domain (Nelson and Chowdhury 1994). Failure to recognise the multiplicity of women's political roles is built into background assumptions of male dominance and men's monopoly of power. To support this view, Nelson and Chowdhury (1994) in their book *Women and Politics Worldwide* argue that some of these assumptions are further reinforced by the notion that politics occur beyond and outside the domestic sphere that is associated with women. The low representation of women in politics has been a concern for Samoa for many years, yet there is very little specific literature on the issue in Samoa. This literature review will not only provide a discussion but also an analysis of the existing literature on women's political representation. It will build on a review of some of the factors identified by Stevens (2007) in her book *Women, Power and Politics* and by Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon (2008) in their article 'A Research Note on the Relationship between Development, Democracy and Women's Political

Representation'. These factors may be social structural or socioeconomic, political or politico-structural, and cultural or ideological. According to these authors some of the factors mentioned may link to other factors - the level of education, the extent to which women work outside the home especially in professions which were previously known as work dominated by men, the nature of the political system, the electoral system adopted by a country, the effect of formal and informal quotas for women, the individual's decision to undertake a political career based on the level of education, professional experience, family support and supportive mechanisms. Later chapters will provide specific and detailed analysis focusing on the cultural factors constraining women's political representation in Samoa and what can be learned from a Polynesian country, given that to date much of the research has been on the challenges of the low representation of women in Melanesian countries (see Wallace 2011).

The question of gender inequality in women's political representation has been researched and investigated for several parts of the globe. These studies offer different perspectives which need to be located and understood in order to address the research questions effectively. Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon's (2008) suggestion as stated earlier in the introduction supports Mohanty's (2003a) discussion of third world women's lives and struggles. She argues that in any discussion on issues relating to women, the micropolitics of context, subjectivity and struggle as well as the politics of global economic and political systems and processes must be considered. Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon'sclassification and grouping of variables are explored and further debated in the Samoan context later in this thesis. This study will attempt to respond to Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon'ssuggestion about developing a new and suitable theoretical model that would better fit the interests of a small developing country like Samoa. Each chapter will also attempt to consider how Mohanty's micro- and macro political categories apply within the Samoan context.

Taking a different approach in the book *Women, Power and Politics,* Stevens (2007) argues that explanations for the levels of representation of women can be divided into three subcategories: social structural or socioeconomic, political or politico-structural and cultural or ideological. Socioeconomic factors, in Stevens' view, may link to many other factors like the level of female education and the extent to which women work outside the home, especially in professions which were previously known as work

dominated by men (judges, journalists, professors, managing directors). For the structural factors, Stevens nominates the nature of the political system, the nature of the political regime, of the electoral system and of the party system, the orientation and balance of the political parties and the presence of formal or informal quotas for women. For the cultural and ideological factors, Stevens identifies the individual's decision to undertake a political career based on the level of education, professional experience, personal inspiration and motivation, family support and supportive mechanisms. She argues that all these factors are complex and controversial but can be categorised as stemming from considerations of justice, of symbolism and legitimacy, of the need to improve deliberation within democracy and of the need for women to be bold enough to protect their own interests (pp. 80-97). Stevens continues by arguing that it is very difficult to determine which variable or combination of variables will lead to possible representation of women in politics, because every country's history or culture is different. This is what she meant when referring to the factors as complex and controversial. Stevens further clarified this by stating that a woman might have all the personal motivation, drive, inspiration, the right qualifications and the family support but if the cultural system doesn't allow women to run for politics then these are meaningless.

Wallace (2011) in her research on women in decision making in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, reported in an article titled 'Paddling the Canoe on One Side', shares the view of Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon (2008), that the low representation of women in politics is common to many countries of the world. However, Wallace argues that it is particularly obvious in countries like Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. She follows Douglas' explanation:

> They are excluded by virtue of male prejudice, lack of education and opportunity and to some extent by choice. Notoriously women rarely vote for female candidates and most women, especially uneducated rural dwellers, agree with men that politics is men's business (Wallace 2011, p. 505).

Wallace continues by arguing that having legal frameworks and policies in place is one factor to address the issue but it can only depend upon the establishment of a more cooperative relationship between NGO, community and government sectors. Moreover,

she believes that there is the need for a consistent approach to resolving the issue and identifying processes for effective change, so that change occurs at a pace which is culturally appropriate and not one that is imposed from outside. This study will argue that the processes for effective change identified by Wallace are also relevant to a Polynesian society. Later in the thesis, there will be a comparative analysis of all the various models mentioned so far - Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon (2008), Mohanty (2003), Stevens (2007) and Wallace (2011) - and other factors specific to Samoa will be proposed.

Gendered Concepts of Power

To understand women's participation in politics, it is important that we understand the concepts of power and gender, and the interaction between the two. The ability to represent or be able to voice an opinion is associated with the concepts of power, leadership, authority and participation. According to Cox (1996), these concepts are unfamiliar to most women. She illustrated this by saying that:

> Sensing and owning our own power are not experiences many women share or find familiar. Instead we are often socialised to share pain and develop forms of resistance to perceived male power. Few women learn to deal with risk taking or are encouraged to develop the belief that we can do what we want by and for ourselves. Thus for a majority of women, the concept of power is both alienating and alien (p. 17)

Cox goes on to argue that the word leadership also brings to mind negative reactions for many people because of its association with power.

Power has been conceptualised in many different ways. Cox (1996), for example, offers two ways of understanding power that are already gendered. The first includes force, might, potency, strength, energy, stamina, vigour, authority, command, control, domination and omnipotence. She argues that these words are associated with masculine attributes to the point where, when coupled with 'woman', they become judgmental. Secondly she defines power as ability, capacity, faculty, potential or skill. Cox views the definitions in the second category as being more likely to be attractive to

women, as they refer to having power to do or to act, rather than having power over another. Cox goes onto explain that 'power' in second wave feminism was often seen as very personal and related to oppression in gender relationships. In addition, she states that whenever power is discussed or mentioned in feminist publications of the time, power was usually defined as power over rather than power to and these definitions primarily referred to the negative experiences of the victims of male power. In her view, there was a close association between power and oppression, whether by individual men or by institutions that operated on masculine lines (pp. 17-21). According to Cox, these definitions plainly illustrate one of the major barriers that face women attempting to adopt aspects of power such as participating in public decision making or participating in parliament (p. 19).

By contrast, Paxton and Hughes (2007) in their book *Women, Politics and Power* use the definition of power developed by Max Weber and subsequently used by sociologists; that is 'the ability to impose one's will on others, even in the face of opposition'. These authors specifically refer to Weber's argument that 'power' is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests (p. 19). Paxton and Hughes argue that according to such a definition, power is a valued resource that cannot be held by all. If one person has it, another does not. In this view power is overt and it is applied directly and visibly. However Paxton and Hughes share the view with other theorists such as Foucault, Gramsci, Mills and Parsons that there is not one proper way to define or conceptualise such a complicated concept in order to account for all its varied aspects. They argue that with research in the field of women in politics, it is vitally important to conceptualise power in a way that accounts for ways of exercising power that are less visible or overt. This study is interested in Paxton and Hughes' definition as it looks at different relationships within the Samoan context and how these power dynamics impact gender relations and gender interpretations within a specific culture.

In the book '*Women, Men and Power*' Lips (1991) agrees that the multi-faceted concept of power is hard to define and that the preceding definitions treat power as a commodity; something that a person or a group collects and has. At the same time Lips acknowledges some social arguments that define power not as a commodity, not

something we have, but something we do. In this light, power is referred to as something that exists only in the context of a relationship; it is part of the process of that relationship. Lips further argues that power is the process of bargaining and compromise in which priorities are set and decisions are made in relationships; both parties, even if one dominates the other, still contribute to the process. Lips believed that we cannot think of power as a 'thing' that only the powerful possess but a process in which all parties engage as long as everyone is part of a network of human relationships (p. 4). These definitions raise important questions that will be further discussed when investigating Samoan women's participation in politics - the questions of power relations and power dynamics and how these are practised and understood within the Samoan context. This study takes the concept that power is contextualised not as a commodity, not as indicating power over someone, but as the process of bargaining and compromising within a relationship, and applies that concept to a specific relationship, *feagaiga/*the covenantal relationship between sister and brother, within a specific culture, the Samoan culture. In so doing, the thesis is strengthening and extending the approaches from the existing literature.

From a community development perspective, Nelson and Wright (1995) agree with Cox's definition but further explain that power is experienced and encountered both in the everyday life of human beings and as part of social systems. Stevens (2007), in her attempt to define the concept of power, argues that this concept has been defined in different ways by scholars using different approaches - positivist, pluralist, Marxist or feminist. She herself uses one of the widely used definitions, 'the ability of a person or group to cause events to occur or not to occur, in the ways which she, he or they want to, even if the preferences of others involved are different' (p. 9). She argues that this notion of power recognises that wherever power is, there is always the possibility of conflict, and that the physical, emotional and psychological needs of individuals and groups are not always mutually compatible.

However, Stevens also applauds Lukes, a researcher whose definition of power is viewed by Stevens as highly influential and radical. Lukes talks about 'the supreme and most insidious exercise of power to prevent people from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things because they take it that either there is no alternative, or it is

natural or beneficial' (Stevens 2007, p. 9). Stevens believes that Lukes' viewpoint moves the argument forward as it provides a means to compare the power of one actor or group over another by considering the social structure in which individuals and groups operate. Paxton and Hughes (2007) in their book "Women, Politics and Power also referred to Lukes' discussion on power where Lukes believes that power doesn't come just from an individual or group's intrinsic qualities but from the roles and social relationships that structure power relations (Paxton and Hughes 2007, p. 20). In Lukes' view this is particularly relevant to the position of women in most societies, where they learn to avoid, suppress, prevent, deal with and resolve the potential and actual conflicts that constitute politics. This is even more relevant to women from societies where the outcome of conflicts and strategies are collective decisions, which are accepted as binding on all the members of the collectivity and which shape society (Stevens 2007, pp. 9, 10). Lukes' definition of power raises interesting questions for a very strong traditional society like Samoa, where everything is done collectively, where decisions are based on a consensus approach and where power is believed to be inherited by both men and women. However the low representation of women in parliament might be translated and fitting with the second dimension of his definition of power where he refers to power as preventing the preferences of others from reaching the agenda. Not only that but it could also be translated by others as an act of power over another. In contrast to Lukes' view, Paxton and Hughes (2007) point out that other structural theorists emphasise the importance of the individual norms, outside of the immediate relationship, which contribute to the power of one party. Paxton and Hughes use the example of a teacher-student power relation which is affected by factors such as parents, university admissions officers and companies, who take cues from the teacher. The teacher's power in this case is not only reinforced by these actors but also by social norms, eg expectations that the teacher will be addressed as Mr or Ms. In Paxton and Hughes' view, similar considerations apply when thinking about women in politics, where one must think of how women's power relations are affected by political parties, pressure groups, cultural beliefs and global forces (p. 21).

In an effort to address gendered power directly, Paxton and Hughes (2007) refer to the feminist theorist's emphasis on the process of personal transformation as another form of 'power within' rather than 'power over'. This is based on Kabeer's (1994)

explanation that 'when women or men come to better understand themselves and their position in an unequal world, they then can be inspired to challenge gender inequality'

This study builds on Paxton and Hughes definition of gendered power to consider how women's power relations are affected by other factors such as cultural beliefs and norms, individual motivation and transformation, political processes and structures, and global forces.

Gender, Culture and Politics

Next is a review of the different views on gender and culture and how these elements impact women's political representation.

In the past men's political behaviour has been seen as the norm by political scientists and women's actions were analysed in terms of a departure from this male norm. Many myths and stereotypes have grown up about women's political participation with women being portrayed as passive, apolitical and conservative. Many feminists have endeavoured to break these stereotypes. According to Afshar (1996) these stereotypes and myths are not specific to any region or one country, but rather shared worldwide, regardless of the political system and environment or cultural and economic background.

Politics is a many sided activity which is impervious to one simple definition. For instance Garner, Ferdinand and Lawson (2009) refer to it as something associated with antagonistic behaviour. For them, politics reflects the conflictual nature of society, the fact that all societies of any complexity contain a range of different interests and values, and politics is the process by which groups representing divergent interests and values make collective decisions (pp. 2- 3). Lasswell (1936) defines politics very simply in the title of her book as 'Who gets What, When, How?' Such a definition clearly indicates that the way in which economic goods are distributed is a crucial aspect of determining the nature of society and the well-being of those who live within it. According to Garner, Ferdinand and Lawson politics is often a popular concept because it is associated with corruption, intrigue and conflict, but they go on to argue that

participation in political processes is an extremely noble activity that should be encouraged.

Stevens defines politics as a 'human activity; something that people do involving relationships with one or more other people and therefore [it] exists within a social setting – a collectivity or community of two or more people' (Stevens 2007, p. 9).

However Wallace (2011) in her study argues that traditionally politics and decision making on matters of importance to societies and communities in the Pacific region are often considered men's business and that women are significantly under-represented in all major forms of public decision making. Tongamoa (1988) also expressed the same view: 'Pacific women have no formal power though they can be very influential. Men are the heads of families and of the kinship or the chiefly network. In public meetings men are the spokesmen and the ultimate decision makers (p. 89). Wallace describes the traditional understanding and practice of politics in the Pacific as an individual act of men. This description does not sit well with Stevens' definition of politics.

Pacific scholars like Tongamoa (1988) and Fairbairn-Dunlop (1996) challenge the universal definitions and argue that a clear understanding of the cultural norms and values as well as an understanding of the status of Pacific women is crucial in putting things into perspective. They argue that the status of Pacific women is very much influenced by their varied environment, culture, history and economy and that the division of labour between sexes in the different Pacific island societies is clearly defined, understood and accepted. Women are generally confined to the home and domestic chores while men are associated with duties outside and away from home. Women accept their roles as mothers and housewives, while men welcome their roles as heads of families, defenders and decision makers. Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon (2008) emphasise the importance of understanding the culture as one of the critical elements in women's political representation. They move on to argue that because of culture's vital contribution in this context, better measures of culture need to be put in place (p.458). Stewart-Withers (2011) also supports this point of view in an article titled 'Contesting a Third World development category: Female-headed households in Samoa' by stating that culture plays a much more significant role in the life of Pacific countries than in any other region of the world.

Electoral System

One aspect of politics that needs further investigation is the role of the electoral system. Women continue to be strongly under-represented in elected office, despite the scale of change in the family and the work force which has transformed almost every aspect of women's and men's lives during the post-war era, and despite the growth of the women's movement, which has altered the political culture. In the development literature the electoral system is viewed as one of the contributing factors to the under-representation of women in politics and public decision making. Norris (2000) clearly sets out the issue by stating that debates about electoral reform have revolved around the practical impact of changes to the status quo and underlying these arguments are contested visions about the fundamental principles of representative democracy, the central normative criteria that an electoral system should meet, and whether the virtues of strong and accountable government are more or less important than social representation, including that of women and ethnic minorities (Norris 2000p.1)

Statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the organisation that acts as the focal point for world-wide parliamentary dialogue and for the establishment of representative democracy, show the situation not only globally but specifically in the Pacific region. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) there were just under 5000 women in parliament worldwide in 2015, representing 13.3% of the membership of lower houses and 10.6% of upper houses. The situation varies markedly by region. Women do best in the Nordic region, and most notably in Sweden, with an average of 38.3% of MPs in the lower house, compared with only 3.6% in Arab states, with few or no female representatives in parliaments such as Djibouti, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. Elsewhere the proportion of women members falls between these extremes - the Americas (15.4%), Europe (15.0%), Asia (14.3%) and the Pacific region (11.5%)

Within this context Norris (2000) argues that the most important factors affecting women's representation are the basic electoral formula that determines how votes are counted to allocate seats and the use of legal strategies for affirmative action.

Duverger (1954) and Rae (1971) analysed and classified the four main types of electoral systems: proportional representation which includes open and closed party lists in regional or national constituencies using largest remainders and highest averages formulae; semi-proportional systems which include the single transferable vote, cumulative vote and alternative vote; majoritarian electoral systems including plurality, second ballot and the alternative vote; and lastly mixed systems like the Additional Member System, which combines majoritarian and proportional elements. According to both Duverger and Rae their comparisons confirmed that women continue to be better represented under proportional representation. However the results of their comparisons were far from linear due to intervening systemic factors like the structure of opportunities to enter legislative office and in particular the process of recruitment within parties, which includes the formal and informal rules, and the party organisation.

Samoa uses a first past the post electoral system (Fraenkel 2005). This is the system which Duverger and Rae found to be associated with more women representatives in politics. However, Samoa is one of the Pacific countries with a proven history of very low numbers of women in parliament. Huffer (2006) carried out a desk review of the factors enabling or constraining the advancement of women's political representation in Pacific Forum island countries by analysing government reports, policy documents and annual activity reports. This review supported Duverger's and Rae's claims that the recruitment process and the formal and informal rules of the political parties are factors in limiting women's participation. Similarly from Samoa's Shadow CEDAW report:

> Currently no political party has a gender sensitive manifesto or quota to provide for its support of women candidates to run from safe seats. There is little promotion of women as potential candidates for election to parliament and no established programmes or initiatives to assist women in political endeavours (PPSEAWA et al 2004, p.7).

Samoa's ruling party also follows a conservative ideology. Human Rights Protection Party seats in Samoa can only be contested by a *matai/*chief. Although competition is now the norm, the Samoan candidate selection process has always been based on the *matai/*chief. In an electorate that is meeting to agree on a candidate, the one who is a much respected high chief or who has served his people well or who is believed to have

made his village or region well known within Samoa or overseas through outstanding achievement is usually selected. According to Fiame Naomi Mataafa, one of Samoa's longest serving female parliamentarian and cabinet members, there are two major problems for women entering parliamentary politics in Samoa: the first is the entry point criteria of being a *matai* and being in power. Fiame suggested that in order to increase the numbers of women in national politics, women must obtain a chiefly title for use as a power base, gain an understanding of the political system and become economically independent with a solid support base while remaining clear about their goals (Drage 1995, p.77).

The focus in this thesis is on the role of culture as a factor on the women's role in decision making rather than on the strengths or weaknesses of the electoral system in Samoa. Suffice to say here that more research needs to be done on the proportional participation system and how it may be used to resolve the issue of the lack of women in the Samoan parliament.

Gender and Gender Stratification

In *Gender Indicators in Science, Engineering and Technology: An Information Toolkit* Huyer and Westholm (2007) argue that although gender is socially determined and may vary according to local circumstances within a region or between regions, nevertheless in all cultures of the world women have clearly defined roles and responsibilities according to the socially defined gender division of labour. Although in some cultures these roles are currently being questioned, the defined division of labour continues to determine the differing roles and responsibilities as well as the differing needs and interests of women and men. However, as Paxton and Hughes (2007) remind us, gender roles are not fixed but created and recreated, changing according to social, environmental, economic and technological trends. These gender roles and gender differentiated interests are affected by social factors such as the institutional arrangements that create and reinforce gender based constraints or that conversely foster an environment in which gender disparities can be reduced. Social and cultural attitudes, and ethnic and class/caste based obligations also determine men's and women's roles, responsibilities and decision making functions. In addition to this are the religious beliefs and practices that limit women's mobility, social contact, access to resources and

the types of activities they can pursue. Lastly, the formal legal system reinforces customs and practices which give women inferior legal status in many countries (Huyer and Westholm 2007, Paxton and Hughes 2007).

The position of women in the political life of Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries and the developments that have occurred over recent decades are explained by Stevens (2007) as being closely linked to the changes in their economic and social position so that a cycle of cause and effect comes into play. Political changes may place women in a position to influence the economic and social conditions of their lives while developments in society and the economy underpin women's claim to enhanced political status. However, Stevens also argues that the sexual division of labour helps to explain the way in which modern societies have evolved. In Stevens' view, the traditional division confined women largely to the domestic sphere and to the reproduction and nurture of children as their primary role while generally affording to men a much greater share of both power and resources.

Regardless of the differences between particular studies or different authors, worldwide, despite institutional and cultural variation, women have less power than men. This unequal power is described in familiar terms like 'gender stratification', 'gender inequality', 'female disadvantage', 'sexism' or 'patriarchy'. Patriarchy according to Paxton and Hughes (2007) is a term used to describe the social system of male domination over females, where male domination is built into the social, political and economic institutions of society. Patriarchal societies are characterised by male control of economic resources, male domination of political processes and positions of authority, as well as male entitlement to sexual services. Paxton and Hughes believe that although some feminists view some societies as more patriarchal than others, all modern societies have a patriarchal structure (p. 27)

Women's power relations to men vary not only across cultures but within societies as well. Specifically, under patriarchy, the literature agrees that women almost always have more power in the home than in political or economic environments outside of family life. The concept of public sphere and private sphere distinguishes between these two domains and describes how it has been considered natural for women's concerns to be in the home, the private sphere. However, it is worth noting that in some societies,

women may still lack control over important decisions regarding how resources should be allocated within the home, eventhough the private sphere is generally considered a female domain. According to this perspective, women's focus should be on the family, rearing children and entertaining their husbands. As an illustration of this, Paxton and Hughes (2007) discuss a form of belief in the United States during the 1800s, the Cult of True Womanhood, where women's behaviour was defined as piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. According to this ideology, women were encouraged to assist the church, a task that didn't threaten to take women away from what was perceived as their proper sphere. But if any woman wanted more than these four virtues, she was thought to be tampering with society, undermining civilisation or unwomanly. Such a perspective was criticised by Paxton and Hughes as a true underestimation of a woman's ability, as a direct practice of power over women and as a true example of discrimination given that women were excluded from engaging in political representation or running for office (p. 26).

Tongamoa (1988) and Fairbairn-Dunlop (1996) argue that the division of labour between sexes in the Pacific island societies is the most influential factor in defining the status of Pacific women. Moreover this division of labour is viewed by Cox (1996) as an act of 'power over' women because, as she notes, women's unpaid work and domestic duties do not count when it comes to decision making and deciding who has the power (p. 29). Cox believes that this needs to change, so that society as a whole can benefit from what women have to offer.

In her book '*Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*', Kabeer (1994) refers to this division of labour as 'gender relations', i.e. social relations that create and reproduce systematic differences in the positioning of women and men in relation to institutional processes and outcomes. In a later article 'Women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth: labour markets and enterprise development' Kabeer (2012) further argues that these power relations block women's capacity to participate in, and help to influence, development processes, and she highlights the nature of those changes which serve to promote such capacity at both individual and collective level. According to Kabeer (1994), many attempts to change gendered power relations have failed for a variety of reasons. She notes that gender relations are interwoven into the broader set of social relations that structure the division of resources

and responsibilities, claims and obligations between different social groups of women and men within any given society. In her view, any gender awareness in policy and planning requires a prior analysis of the social relations within the relevant institutions of family, market, state and community in order to understand how gender and other inequalities are created and reproduced through the separate and combined interactions of these institutions (Kabeer 1994). This is particularly pertinent to the situation in Samoa. In a later study Kabeer called for an attempt to link change at the level of individuals with the more collective forms of agency needed to bring about sustained structural change:

> …the conceptualisation of empowerment that informs this [research] touches on many different aspects of change in women's lives, each important in themselves, but also in their interrelationship with other aspects. It touches on women's sense of self-worth and social identity; their willingness and ability to question their subordinate status and identity; their capacity to exercise strategic control over their own lives and to renegotiate their relationships with others who matter to them; and their ability to participate on equal terms with men in reshaping the societies in which they live in ways that contribute to a more just and democratic distribution of power and possibilities (Kabeer 2012, p. 8).

On top of this, Fairbairn-Dunlop (1991) argues that any analysis of women's work must also include the examination of ideologies of gender which articulate with the sexual division of labour. She argues that the experiences of women in the developing world can never be explained solely in terms of gender, as is claimed in much of the Women and Development literature nor solely in terms of global economic relations, as is claimed in much of the economic development literature. Kabeer and Fairbairn-Dunlop both pose questions that are very relevant to this thesis and these will be further explored in later chapters, when discussing different institutional efforts to combat gender inequalities in Samoa at the local and national level. This thesis aims also to bring a personal dimension into the frame through the interviews I conducted with women in Samoa in relation to the status of women and their role in decision making.

In the book *Sustainable Development or Malignant Growth? Perspectives of Pacific Island Women* (Emberson-Bain 1994), Emberson-Bain supports Kabeer's approach of

interweaving gender relations into the broader picture of development in any society. She argues that because of the conflicts arising in the Pacific, in Bougainville, Fiji and the Solomon Islands, and as a result of top down development models imposed by either political elites or international donor partners, it is time to place emphasis on female gender issues, especially the changing double burden experienced by women as productive and reproductive workers in the customs, family and work spheres. According to Emberson-Bain emphasising women's diverse and multi-faceted roles will shed light on issues such as women's political participation and representation. Likewise Pollard (2003), in her work on the range of women's groupings in the Solomon Islands, supports Emberson-Bain's (1994) argument that women's skills can confer greater benefit to their society. Even though Kabeer, Emberson-Bain and Pollard do not focus on Samoa specifically, they nonetheless raise significant issues regarding gender and development that can be explored and considered in the Samoan context.

Phillips and Ilcan (2000) draw on the work of Boserup (1970), which challenges women's positioning in development, to argue that the sexual division of labour varies across countries and regions. Spatial domestication is considered and highly valued as a factor in the positioning of women in development, especially in the areas of leadership and political representation (Phillips and Ilcan 2000, p. 206). Phillips and Ilcan define space in the context of their study as boundaries or distinctions that are culturally and technically produced and that therefore always embody particular relational meanings. The concept of spatial domestication is referred to as a process that ranks, orders, tames and monitors spatial domains such as households, rural settings, market towns, informal and formal economies, industrial factories and the people that engage with them (p. 206). To Samoans, the concept of space (*va*)/spatial relations (*vafealoai*) is considered crucial in the everyday life of every individual, as it is the core of the *faasamoa* and considered key to determining leadership positions. Huffer (2006) and Soo and Fraenkel (2005) argue that in the face of increasing global uncertainty and growing socio-economic inequalities, the concept of *vafealoai* (spatial relations) needs to be thoroughly defined and analysed to avoid misconception from a western perspective. The value of space relations as argued by Huffer (2006) and Soo and Fraenkel (2005) is supported by Tongamoa:

> The islanders were not conscious of any competition between men and women, because they perceived their ascribed and traditional roles and responsibilities as being divinely sanctioned and unchangeable, to be carried out for the benefit of everybody in the family and the community.... (Tongamoa 1988, p. 89).

According to Tongamoa, the perspective around the division of labour has changed since contact with western culture. Educated Pacific women have begun to question and reject the sexual division of labour as unfair, degrading and biased against women. Not only that but it denies equal rights to women, thus continuously affirming their inferiority and subordination to men. For Tongamoa such change has taken place to varying degrees in Pacific societies and it correlates with the extent of western influences through formal education, wage employment, the mass media, overseas travel, exposure to modern technologies, increased use of contraceptives and long term planning by families and parents.

The change in women's attitudes toward the division of labour is also a result of joint campaigns and programmes by the government and non-government organisations for women's rights in the early years of ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. This movement was mostly rejected by Samoan society because of the belief that 'women's rights' is a foreign concept and against dominant cultural structures. As Grugel and Piper (2007) rightly argue, while rights are being codified and claimed in the context of deepening global inequalities and while rights charters are championed by the United Nations system, states are far more reluctant to endorse them. Grugel and Piper believe that, to avoid this, it is important to ask what rights mean in vulnerable communities, what kind of rights are being codified and whether it is possible to make rights real through global legislation. Moreover, they also believe that it is our task to examine the new global regimes or norms for rights to see whether they act as useful tools for tackling injustice and social, political and economic exclusion (p.1)

Colonialisation, Christianity and Gender

Colonialisation has had an influential impact on Pacific island societies and how they live today. As far as the political representation of women is concerned, it is well understood that colonial and missionary influences fostered a patriarchal system within indigenous cultures that adversely affected some of the matrilineal cultures around the Pacific. According to Hermkens (2011), women in the past in Bougainville had legitimate influence on public decision making, but this changed due to colonialism. Viewing customs as fixed in Pacific island societies overlooks how much customary values have been modified through the contact of Pacific island communities with colonial, missionary and other influences of globalisation (Douglas 2002). Prior to European contact, matrilineal political and economic structures were present in tribal societies in many parts of the region. They privileged women's land rights, women's rights in decision-making and their role in economic exchange (Macintyre 2012). Yet these structures were generally undermined as colonial governments created legal systems that replicated the patriarchal, hierarchical and hereditary structures of their own societies (Huffer 2006). In addition, through their participation in mission church groups, women were often encouraged to take up domestic activities considered to be more feminine and appropriate for women (Douglas 1999). The combined legacies of these colonial and missionary influences have devalued women's household and agricultural work as subsistence, rather than economically productive, and celebrated instead the productiveness of men's public economic and political capacities. Religion has constrained women's political participation in other ways. Early post-Independence political leaders in many parts of the region were missionary educated, and some were ordained religious leaders. Not surprisingly, their political and customary perspective on governance was highly influenced by religious values.

Culture

It is crucial to provide a definition of this difficult concept, culture. According to Rathje (2009), culture is commonly understood and defined as uniformity within a social system, ethnicity or nationality, a common spoken language, norms and values. While this definition is useful for investigating issues of gender and decision-making, an

understanding of culture which includes structural issues and that draws more specifically on Samoa will be adopted.

Stewart-Withers (2011) contends that 'the manner of the Samoans according to Samoan customs and traditions, the *faasamoa*, means that the Samoan people understand what is expected of them and every member knows their place, the expectations of them and their duties' (p. 173). Chan Mow in Soo's book titled "Changes in the Matai System: O Suiga i le Faamatai" (Soo 2007) on the other hand defined *faasamoa* as the framework of action based upon the social structure and the practice of Samoan customs and Samoan culture, and the *matai* system as the hierarchical system of authority around which Samoan society is organised.

Gershon (2012) describes culture as a classificatory category when one examines the ways in which the cultural/acultural divide is constructed. How do people mutually constitute the cultural and acultural in different contexts, and what are the consequences that flow from these constructions? Gershon examines the deployment of 'culture' in the context of Samoan migrants to New Zealand and the United States of America. How do different definitions and uses of the concept of culture work for migrants? Migrants are expected by state bureaucracies to be cultural experts, but does the concept 'culture' work in the same way when these migrants are invoking culture within their families or local communities? (Gershon, 2012. pp. 4 - 5). Gershon argues that culture is used, described, and understood, in different instances especially by migrants. Illustrating this the author argues that for some years culture was used as one of the key concepts to generate funding for development projects. In this instance, culture was defined and understood as a result of classification, what counts as culture was being shaped by what doesn't count as culture. In the case of Samoan migrants navigating government bureaucracies in New Zealand and the United States, what this means is that they are navigating different ways of defining both the cultural and the acultural. At the same time, they are also acting upon their own definitions of what is cultural and acultural, developed in their local communities, churches and among their extended families. Gershon, in her attempt to define such a complex concept, focuses on how the different people are social analysts in their own right, and how their social analysis shaped how they were engaging with what they understood to be culture and what others understood to be culture. She argues that what counts as culture is a constantly moving target.

People bring different understandings and practices to play in fashioning what will count as culture (Gershon, 2012. p.167). Gershon's reflections in this book unwraps the difficult nature of this study given the different perceptions on not only the power dynamics after colonisation as well as Christian intervention over the years which construct different perceptions on the status of Samoan women, what they should and should not be doing, but also different understanding by people given the context of the location that they are in. However it is the intention of this thesis to explore some of these further into the discussion individual chapters.

These social and organisational structures and systems that govern the village and family life underpin the analysis of culture in this thesis. Within the *faasamoa*, Tagaloa (1997) describes Samoan women as being the most highly valued status group in the village since they held and transmitted *mana*/sacred power. Sisters and their brothers were bound in a sacred covenant called *feagaiga* where the brother was to serve and protect the sister no matter what the situation. According to Fairbairn-Dunlop (1996), women's position as *feagaiga* guaranteed women equal rights with their brothers. The sisters were given the title of *taupou* (ceremonial virgin) which was the Samoan feminine status equivalent to the chiefly titles bestowed upon the brothers. These ascribed statuses bring with them assigned responsibilities, where women according to Tagaloa (1997) were known as the healers, teachers, the priestesses, makers of wealth and the peacemakers. By contrast, men were the protectors, the decision-makers and the spokesman for the family and were responsible for all the heavy duties - cultivating the land, building, being warriors and other prescribed roles. The spatial relationship between the sister and the brother is the most important aspect of this covenant relationship. From it arise some of the taboos such as women not being allowed to sit in decision making processes because most decisions are critical and because the language used is inappropriate for the sister's ear. Tagaloa (1997) and Fairbairn-Dunlop (1996) argue that in the case of tensions, the sister plays a vital role since she acts as the conflict resolver. This role is reflected in her honorific title *'Pae ma le Auli',* 'the mediator'. If in a decision-making process consensus is hard to reach, the sister's approval is sought and the overall, final decision is hers.

The existing literature around the cultural roles and the status of women in other parts of the Pacific region shows similarities across the three sub-regions, Micronesia,

Melanesia and Polynesia. However Tongamoa (1988) and McLeod (2007) demonstrate that, although there are many similarities, there are still differences in culture and power relations, such as the rights to own land and the rights to acquire chiefly or 'big man' titles. McLeod, in his important analysis of the different types of leadership models in the Pacific region, highlighted the differences between the big man system in some parts of Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, where the term 'big man' is unreservedly male, and the chiefly system in Polynesian countries such as Samoa, where men and women have equal rights to own land and acquire chiefly (*matai*) titles.

Existing literature on the status of women in Samoa highlights that even though women and men have equal rights when selecting a family chief, the practice is that titles are most often bestowed upon the male. According to Tiffany (1987), Samoan women believe that consenting to give the title to male siblings is done not only out of mutual respect, arising from the sister and brother covenant, but as a reward for performing the masculine duties of being warriors, protecting the family and acting as the liaison or the spokesperson for the family. In the Samoan context, the act of title referral by the sisters is a practice that is highly respected and it is regarded as the norm within Samoan society. This raises interesting questions from a development perspective and highlights the need for further debate about concepts of empowerment, gender relations and power in Samoa. These issues and problems will be elaborated in the chapters to follow.

While there is a wide literature on the concept of culture and also on gender inequalities in a range of countries and contexts, and a specific body of knowledge about women in the Pacific, there remains an absence of research looking directly at women's participation and political representation in Samoa through the lens of culture. This thesis aims to redress this imbalance and contribute to the scholarship in the area by providing a detailed analysis of the cultural factors both constraining and enabling women's political representation in Samoa.

CHAPTER 2

UPEGA O FILIGA[1]
DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

No context is value-free. Academic disciplines promote particular ways of observing, dissecting, measuring, interpreting, and otherwise making sense of the phenomena under investigation. One's decisions may emerge within or resistant to these disciplinary structures. One's decisions also derive from one's research goals, which are seldom acknowledged in research reports but which meaningfully affect the design, process, and outcome of a study (Markham 2006, p. 38).

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological design of the research - the research questions, the aims and scope of the research and the methods chosen. This is a qualitative study that uses feminist theory within an ethnography framework to inform the research process. My experience as a Samoan woman is positioned within the methodology so that it serves as a guide for the research. However this also introduces the complexity of conducting research where the researcher is positioned both as outsider and insider. The fieldwork data are also discussed. This fieldwork data, the interview materials, are referred to as 'tales from the field'/*talatalaga mai le malae,* a Samoan phrase used to describe stories collected from the grassroots for any research purposes. By calling these stories 'tales from the field' I acknowledge and honour the experiences and in-depth knowledge of the women interviewed. It is this experience and knowledge which inform the arguments of this thesis.

Upega o Filiga is both a tool used in Samoa's traditional 'fishing' in the wild forest and also a structural metaphor that symbolises the entire process of catching pigeons. Eventhough catching pigeons is conducted in the wild forest, it is regarded by Samoans as a 'fishing' activity, fishing not at sea but in the wild forest/*faiva o le vao. Upega o*

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[1] Net/Snare used as a method to catch pigeons/choosing an option.

Filiga symbolises the whole process of catching pigeons. It starts from the art of choosing and refining quality materials and moves on to the proper protocol for weaving a good, strong snare. It represents the process of the fisherman's mental preparation, choosing the right mountains, how to approach the catching and all the associated internal and external actions for the entire activity. The concept itself metaphorically foretells the complicated and complex nature of carrying out this particular fishing activity in Samoan.

Upega o Filiga therefore is an appropriate metaphor to depict the difficult process a researcher has to go through in deciding the method or conceptual framework that is most appropriate for a study, particularly for a study of women's political representation and participation in Samoa. This process is made difficult because as a researcher there are numerous factors to consider, for example the way different disciplines promote specific forms of knowledge as well as shaping the nature of the issue investigated (Markham 2006). *Upega o Filiga* will be referred to many times in this chapter, as it best explains the rethatching and reweaving processes that are required in using and reflecting on the chosen methodological tools to ensure that the questions under investigation in this thesis are answered thoroughly.

Feminism

The struggle of women to be recognised is evident in the history of the feminist movement from its beginnings in the 18th century up to the present day. Most of the original writings on this movement were done by western, white feminists, based on their struggle in the western world. Haslanger, Tuana and O'Connor (2013) in their study *Topics in Feminism* consider the range of the actions taken to liberate women's rights and to improve the status of women, and they then assert that the term 'feminism' itself is understood in many different ways and that its meanings are often contested. They go on to argue that eventhough the meanings of the concept are contested in many ways, feminism has still contributed much to philosophy. These contributions include a variety of particular moral and political claims, different ways of asking and answering questions, critiques of mainstream philosophical views and methods, and new topics of inquiry. They also suggest that feminism provides a wide range of perspectives on social, cultural and political phenomena (Haslanger, Tuana and OConnor 2013, p. 1).

Such claims raise challenging questions for women from strong cultural backgrounds, women whose country's histories, values and norms were affected in some way by colonisation, modernisation and development. For Samoa, as for other countries with a colonial history, the question is how much the impact of colonisation, modernisation and development has influenced the culture from a feminist perspective. If feminism is to be investigated or interpreted in countries with colonial histories, whose perspective should be used? How much can the original cultural context of women be interpreted as is or is it subject to distortions? It is the intent that the research for this study will contribute to a philosophical view on feminism from a specific cultural context, that of Samoa, which is both part of 'the south' and a small island in the Pacific region.

Haslanger, Tuana and O'Connor's (2013) argument that feminism has not been confined to white women in the west is to an extent true for women of the south. However, the relative scarcity of literature and research on gender or women in the Pacific region means that questions remain about whether the existing knowledge is objective, relative or adequate to the issues facing Samoan women today. It is possible to view many of the insights on social, cultural and political phenomena concerning women in the Pacific as being very much influenced from and by western perspectives. The fact remains that most indigenous societies of the south underwent several phases of colonisation, where their cultures were influenced, dominated and some concepts, beliefs and values were transformed by the culture of the colonial powers. The dominant discourse would then be based on viewing these societies after colonisation, with little focus of what they were like prior to colonialism. This thesis therefore argues that in order to distinguish whether knowledge on feminism in the Pacific is relative or objective, any analysis should consider the cultural, social or economic context before and after colonisation.

In addition, although most feminists would probably agree that there is some sense in which achieving equal rights for women is a necessary condition for a feminist movement to succeed, the research in this study follows the contention of Haslanger, Tuana and O'Connor (2013), that this is not sufficient in and of itself. Women's oppression under male domination rarely consists solely in depriving women of political and legal rights but also extends into the structure of societies and the content of cultures (p. 2). Haslanger, Tuana and O'Connor's suggestion may be relevant for

investigating women's oppression or gender relations in the South Pacific islands where women are highly regarded in the context of their very strong cultures and where society's development is heavily dependent on women's contribution. Given the absence of literature on women's equality in the Pacific, a study in contextualising women's cultural stance with regards to gender equality will be a significant contribution both to feminism, and to gender and development literature. It is instructive to begin by asking which approach is more suitable for the culture and the geographical location of the country being researched.

Standpoint Theory

The feminist standpoint approach is one of the most complicated concepts in the gender and development literature in the sense that there is not one specific definition. Not only that but the literature shows that it has been contested and interpreted differently to suit the nature of the topic or environment studied. For example, Butler, Chodorow, Collins, Connell and Smith (Butler et al. 2001) refer to Harding's (1991) work which identifies standpoint in terms of the social positioning of the subject of knowledge, the knower and the creator of knowledge. The authors conclude that Harding's work is built on a diversity of subject positions in the socio-political-economic regimes of colonialism and imperialism. However, they also consider their perspective on standpoint to be different from that of Harding and of Hartsock (1983), in that it does not identify a socially determined position or category of position in society but factors that are crucial to the design of what is originally called a 'sociology for women' which was transformed into a 'sociology of people' where it does not identify a position or category of position, gender, class or race within the society but establishes, as a subject position for institutional ethnography as a method of enquiry, a site for the knower that is open to anyone (Butler et al. 2001, p. 327). The authors argue that standpoint as a design creates a point of entry into discovering the social aspects that does not subordinate the knowing subject to present forms of knowledge of society or political economy. Rather it is a method of enquiry that works from the actualities of people's everyday lives and experience to discover the social as it extends beyond experience (Butler et al. 2001, p. 327). In the global debate about women's political representation culture is claimed to be one of the major barriers to improvement. This study will use standpoint as a method of enquiry to support investigation into the day to day lived experiences not only of

traditional community leaders but of women themselves. In particular this includes their experiences and knowledge as to where Samoan women fit into decision making processes in the context of the Samoan culture.

Mosedale (2014) agrees with Butler et al. (2001) in their discussion of standpoint as a knowledge production framework. However, Mosedale critiques and expands the concept of objectivity in ways that have significant implications for knowledge production in general but particularly knowledge production relating to women's empowerment (p. 1117). Mosedale suggests that standpoint rejects objectivity in its classical sense, ie the claim to be able to achieve transcendence and to position oneself outside of and above the world and to be able to survey it from the platforms of the powerful. Instead standpoint theory embraces the social situation of its own knowledge claims, which are enabled precisely through various experiences of social marginality.

Although Crasnow (2006) critiques early standpoint theorists like Hekman with claims that standpoint is heavily undermined by inaccuracies, this thesis does support Smith's claim, as discussed by Crasnow, that standpoint can be a starting point for inquiry. The standpoint framework allows exploration into the issues of women's oppression or inequality in Samoa while considering social, political and other factors, and it guides the gathering of relevant evidence not only from the perspective of women in a subordinate position but also from a representative range of other perspectives. In addition, investigation of women's oppression in the Pacific generally, and in Samoa specifically, may offer a different perspective on western feminism's perception of women's oppression. As already discussed, this research supports Mohanty's proposition that knowledge should not be universal and that the challenge for any research is to see how local differences allow researchers to explain the connections and border crossings more accurately. Yet this research also aims to see how specifying differences allows us to theorise universal concerns more fully (Mohanty 2003a, p. 501).

Intersectionality

Bastia (2014) provides a feminist critique of development theories, arguing that, although these theories often revolve around inequalities based on class, race and ethnicity, the social relations and multiple, complex identities that lie at the base of persisting inequalities are hardly ever taken into account in either development theories or development practice. In these development theories the discourse with regards to differences is often catalogued but not integrated. The discussion earlier on standpoint perspectives illustrated that one's experience can't be taken as the universal analysis for the complex origins of multiple sources of women's oppression. Historically Samoans believed the country to have its own story of creation, which tells how the God Tagaloalagi joined the many clouds together in marriage and created the Samoan people. There is also the story of cultural formation and social stratification which shows the high social status of Samoan women. In addition there is the story of ancestral history indicating that Samoans came from South East Asia.

Intersectionality is an approach rooted in feminist theory of power and differences, discussed by Bastia (2014). This study employs the intersectionality approach to draw attention to the interconnected and constitutive nature of multiple forms of privileges or oppression. By drawing attention to factors like modernisation, colonisation, civilisation, and migration the aim is to have intersectionality open up new spaces for challenging the primary focus on gender in the literature. This in turn will allow for the emergence of new understandings of how gender is constituted within the Samoan creation story and how it is later understood (Bastia 2014, p. 238). Consequently, the intersectionality approach will assist this thesis in analysing how different forms of disadvantage and advantage intersect and in explaining the specific experience of Samoan women.

Transnational Feminism

Transnational feminism, according to Mohanty (2003b), grew out of an engagement with social, economic, and political struggles that relate to dominance and exploitation in terms of colonial and national contexts. Its focus is on the role of gender, race, class, and sexuality, and on 'the organisation of resistance to hegemonies in the making and

un-making of the nation state'(Mohanty 2003b). Instead of focusing on generalisations of oppression that are assumed of all women living in the global south, transnational feminism examines the specific nature of oppression as it occurs through the intersectionality of race, class, and other social-identity locations within a particular local context. Insights from transnational feminism extend the analysis in this thesis to include a critique of global processes, eg global capitalism and militarism, that may result in inequities. In the case of Samoa, a transnational feminist approach allows an investigation into colonisation, Christianity, cultural beliefs and the political factors which have impacted the Samoan culture and its perception of women.

Given the validity and advantages of the different approaches discussed, given Samoa's geography and its colonial history and background, and given the sensitivity, for cultural reasons, around the topic of research, this study utilises a multidimensional approach which combines standpoint, intersectionality, transnational and ethnographic feminist frameworks to inform the collection, generation and analysis of the data in this study.

Standpoint, intersectional and transnational feminism interrelate and the discussion throughout this thesis will untangle and reflect how these concepts are utilised to flesh out the discussion on "Women in Decision Making" in a Polynesian Island country. Given the lack of literature on the topic of research, standpoint theory is used in this thesis to guide the investigation into the actual day to day experience and knowledge of indigenous Samoans on the issue of women in decision making in Samoa. It will also be used to guide the investigation into the social positioning of the subject of knowledge, particularly regarding Women in decision making in Samoa. In this sense, the knower refers to the researcher, the wider community and generations who will be able to access this thesis for professional development, whereas the creator of knowledge will be twenty-one Samoans whose valuable contribution formulates the entire thesis. The issue of discussion in this thesis is classified as women's oppression, therefore the discussion later will look at the different power dynamics, the changes in these power dynamics as the Samoan society experience various phases of globalisation, economic, social and political struggles and how these struggles open new spaces for challenging primary values, beliefs and traditions. Transnational and intersectionality will be used to guide that discussion. Later in the thesis discussion will include the following: the

faasamoa as the classic example of a culture that doesn't oppress women; how factors of colonisation such as Christianity diminishes the value of women and how development aid influences where women should be placed and different ways the status of women should be measured in traditional societies.

Feminist Research

My childhood reflections, my personal experience within family, village and church as well as my former role for many years as a training and programs officer for women's development – all these revealed the gap between the Samoan ideology on women in decision making and the practice, and these in turn influenced my decision to pursue a research project on women. As an advocate for women, I have always questioned the seemingly simple phrase 'women and girls can be whatever they want to be and can do whatever they want to do.' These were also the parting words of my beloved grandmother. I have always challenged myself with these words in everything that I do, and in my many years of working with Samoan women, I have encouraged them to do the same. However, this complex phrase raises interesting questions. Why, for instance, do the statistics, let alone the practice in the villages, government and the church, tell a different story? I offer my story to show how I arrived at the topic of my research and at the epistemological and methodological assumptions that frame this study.

There are many aspects of feminist research that guide how individuals design and implement a research project and how we write about women's lives. When I speak of feminist research or the use of a feminist lens to guide the research, I speak to a way of engaging with women during the research process, a way of writing about women's lives, a way that does not further marginalise women but that rather contributes in one way or another to their liberation.

The primary methodological approach for this study is the feminist ethnography paradigm, which, in this instance, draws on an interpretive epistemology (Liamputtong 2009). This study approach is referred to as feminist ethnography because it is looking at a description of a particular element of a particular culture, looking at the custom, habits and mutual differences which define that element within that culture. In this case the study is looking at political representation within the Samoan context, building from

the cultural analysis derived from the participants' interviews. This research is constructivist, in that it develops knowledge constructed by the researcher based on an interpretation of the data and literature (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005). Given that the research aim in this study is to unpack structural, personal, cultural and political issues related to women's political representation in Samoa and to identify the cultural factors promoting or constraining women's political representation, then methodologies informed by feminist perspectives are the best approach (Peter, Jackson and Rudge 2007).

The use of feminist ethnography also allows the researcher as well as the researched to open up the intellectual and emotional space for all women to articulate their relations to one another and the wider society. Not only that but it allows space where the personal transforms into the political (Biber 2007, pp. 4-5). As Biber says, the use of the feminist ethnography approach allows the researcher to be drawn into the insights and struggles, and to recognise and acknowledge the importance of women's lived experiences with the goal of unearthing subjugated knowledge. In addition, feminist approaches allow me as the researcher to find the most effective way to approach the gathering of knowledge. Thus the boundaries that divide what can be known and who can be a knower are eliminated, and most importantly women from all walks of life can be involved to make the data more representative (pp. 2-3).

What makes you do this? What are you going to say?

I have often been challenged with these two questions. These questions were asked during the data collection, during informal conversation with my fellow colleagues or even while enjoying a home cooked meal with my husband and children. I was even asked the question of 'why feminist?' I refused to answer the questions on the spot and in most occasions my response was just a simple smile. At times during the fieldwork phase of this study when I was confronted with these questions, I felt uneasy. My inner self was asking more questions: Are these people right? Am I sure myself about what I am doing? The echoes from all these questions are taken up in the *Upega o Filiga* concept. The whole process forced me to reflect on the many issues researchers face during the research process, especially on the discourse around the researcher's position within the research, and from this on the most appropriate methodology for this study.

As a result the chosen methodological framework for this research is a deliberate attempt to be able to involve myself in the methods and to draw on my in-depth experience as a Samoan woman and as a senior employee of the government ministry responsible for women's issues, so that these too could become part of the research process. The chosen methodological approach therefore allows me as the researcher to include my story as part of the study.

Feminist methodological approaches set up the distinction between insider and outsider and Watts (2009) talks about the insider/outsider relationship within research. For me the insider/outsider relationship refers to my position as a student who was born in Samoa, grew up in the village and experienced growing up as a Samoan woman, as the daughter of a paramount chief, and as a sister to two brothers: the insider. Now I am conducting research on my own culture as a student studying abroad: the outsider.

The insider knowledge assists with building on commonalities between me as the researcher and the group investigated, and my insider knowledge of the operational structures of the Samoan society and its culture underpins the credibility and legitimacy of a study, as Watts expected (Watts 2009, p. 387).Furthermore my understanding of the protocols and the practical aspects of the Samoan society made it easier for me to access and interact with participants eventhough there were limitations, which are discussed later. My insider/outsider status permitted me as a Samoan woman to enter the council at the chief's house and to interact with and interview higher status community leaders. It permitted me to engage with the participants and to provide an outline of the context for the practice and for the cultural rules that Samoans have for making sense of their world. My insider knowledge of Samoan cultural protocols and oratory dialect was an advantage when conducting the fieldwork and when it came to describing these aspects in detail.

My outsider status, as a Samoan currently studying outside the investigated culture, permitted me as a researcher to engage critically during the fieldwork to ensure that the person interviewed was not giving false information.

Tools used to collect data

This study used qualitative research methods, in particular semi-structured, in-depth interviews, as the main way to gather data. A participant observation was also used.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used for the purpose of gathering rich data about the individual participants' life experiences in family, village, church and the public sphere. The use of semi-structured interviews is an attempt to capture something of the control of structured interviews without the need to use closed ended questions or to force people into the role of a 'respondent' rather than that of an 'initiator' of information (Fife 2005).

Importantly, Fife (2005) believes that semi-structured interviews allow for a mildly formal setting that provides a chance to develop a conversation along one or more lines without most of the usual chatter and extraneous information that accompanies such talk. At the same time, the use of open-ended questions, gives the interviewee the opportunity to shape his or her responses, or to even change the direction of the interview altogether (Fife 2005, pp. 94-95).

The detailed interviews were facilitated very informally using semi-structured questions. This setup provided a unique opportunity to explore issues raised during the participants' responses in a manner which best obtained information about their feelings, beliefs, attitude and behaviour on the research topic. It also made both the interviewee and the interviewer feel comfortable around each other during the interview, and avoided the interviewer appearing to be an expert on the subject, and the person being interviewed being an object.

There were twenty-one participants interviewed for this study, eleven women and ten men, all of whom held high positions within government, private sector and/or community. They were chosen to present the views of influential people based on their leadership experience. For the women who are actually parliamentarians I wanted to document the full range of their experiences from the family to the village to politics, the challenges they faced and how they overcame them. In addition I decided to have an equal number of women and men participants so that the data is seen as representative

when it comes to discussion and recommendations from this study. Participants included cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, chief executive officers of government ministries and non-government organisations (NGOs), managers from the private sector, community leaders (village mayors), government women representatives, village chiefs (matai), women from the community, church leaders and church ministers.

Potential participants were selected using publicly available lists from the Prime Minister's Office, Legislative Assembly, Ministry of Women, Community & Social Development and the Ministry of Justice, Courts and Administration.

Letters with the research information sheet and consent forms were prepared. These letters were sent out to all thirteen cabinet ministers. Forty letters were send out to parliamentarians, twenty to the ruling party, the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), ten letters to the Opposition Party, Samoa Democratic United Party (SDUP), and ten to the Tautua Samoa Party (TSP). The number of letters sent out to the political parties was based on the number of members. In addition, letters were sent to the chief executive officers of the thirteen government ministries, eighteen to government corporations and ten to managers of private companies. Fifty letters were sent to village mayors (twenty five from Savaii and twenty five for Upolu) and another fifty were sent to government women representatives (twenty five for Savaii and twenty five for Upolu) using a list which was publicly available from the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development. Sixty letters were sent to church ministers from different church denominations in randomly selected villages and a hundred letters were sent out to women and male chiefs across the country (fifty for Upolu and fifty for Savaii). A list of all the church ministers, obtained from the National Council of Churches, and a list of all the registered chiefs in Samoa, obtained from the Ministry of Justice, Courts and Administration, were used to facilitate this process. Factors such as type and kind of church denomination, the population of the congregation and the respective village, geographical location, educational background, leadership roles, the type of chief, how long they had held the title and their age were all considered in identifying who to invite for the study. According to Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) constructing a sample like this involves a process where the representation of concepts is much more critical than the number of people. The aim is not simply to generalise the

findings to the broader population, but to construct a theoretical explanation by specifying the conditions and process that give rise to the variations in a phenomenon. (pp. 50-51)

Letters were sent out to such a large and varied number of people so that the research might get a fair representation of ideas not only from the elite but also from the grassroots, from rural and urban, from young and old. All the letters were sent out in the first week of December 2012. Follow up telephone calls were made after a week to confirm that the letters had been received. Some invitees agreed to participate during the follow up telephone conversation, while others called back later. The actual interviews did not begin until the second week of January, because in the meantime there had been a major cyclone which affected the whole country.

At the start there were concerns about the optimum number of interviews to be conducted and whether the actual number was too few or too many. On this subject Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) state that the scope of the interviews conducted does not really matter. If the researcher is satisfied that the data is rich enough and covers enough of the dimensions they are interested in, then the sample is large enough (p. 49). On this basis twenty-one interviews became a viable sample and the richness of the information provided was enough to cover the questions scheduled. The interviewees included two female cabinet ministers, two male cabinet ministers, two male parliamentarians, three female and three male chief executive officers/managers from government ministries, corporations and the private sector, three male church ministers, two male village mayors, two government women representatives, three village chiefs (two women and one man). Most of the interviews were conducted in the government officials' offices, but the community participants were interviewed in their own homes at their preferred times and dates.

The in-depth interviews were recorded and later transcribed. This process follows Scott et al.'s suggestion (2008) that interviews have to be recorded to allow the researcher during the transcribing stage to capture what was said and how it was said as accurately as possible. Moreover, this ensures that the transcriber avoids inserting their own perceptions or bias during the transcribing process. (Scott et al. 2008). Liamputtong (2010) states that it is highly desirable for all researchers to tape record an in-depth

interview because the researcher needs to pay close attention to what participants say and follow up the conversation, probe and clarify during the interview session. It is difficult to try to write down the conversation at the same time. Liamputtong (2010) further argues that taking notes during an interview may be distracting and disturbing, and would be culturally inappropriate in some cultures. Liamputtong's argument was very pertinent in this research as those interviewed were often not only of high profile but also older than the interviewer. In the *faasamoa* it would be inappropriate to take notes whilst talking to anyone older than you or with a high profile.

The interview questions were based around the spheres of the family, the chiefly system, village and the church, and covered themes such as the cultural status of women with regards to decision-making, how the role of women was perceived in the past as compared to today, and the cultural factors that constrain women's political representation. There were questions as to what model best explains women's political participation in a developing democratic country like Samoa, the effectiveness of various modernisation strategies, and their view on current and possible future initiatives to develop women's representation in parliament. Current initiatives include the National Policy for Women and the 10% quota, which is a temporary affirmative action measure by the government of Samoa to try and increase the number of women in Parliament.

In addition to the interviews, a participant observation was the other research method employed. During the fieldwork period, I stayed with my family in the south east rural area of the island of Upolu, where I took part in family gatherings, church and village events. Some of these gatherings and events were photographed to clarify and further illustrate the observations made. I also used a fieldwork journal where I recorded my reflections on the participant observation component of the fieldwork. I wrote journal entries about the different events I attended – family, village and district events as well as church activities and gatherings. These journal entries have been useful philosophically in providing support for or a point of comparison with the interview responses.

The data collected from the participant observation is to be compared later in this study with the official government reports and policies on women mentioned in the

Introduction above: the reports to UNCEDAWC, the National Policy for Women in Samoa and the public presentations carried out by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD).

Data Presentation

I transcribed the twenty-one interviews from audio files myself. Although this was time consuming it allowed me to keep close to the data and to see the key themes emerge in the first few interviews. Because the majority of the responses were in Samoan there was no qualified expert easily available who could do the task. The initial transcripts have been analysed by means of category construction (Merriam 1998). Constructing categories of data focuses on interpreting recurring themes, so that a grounded theoretical approach to thematic analysis is used (Liamputtong and Ezzy 2005, p. 266) A matrix was developed to record the common themes, which have then been discussed and critically evaluated through the research supervision process. These are the themes which frame the main chapters of this research.

Ethics[2]

Ethical considerations and ethical practice have been applied by the researcher throughout the entire research.

Ethical practice is not purely a process of managing potential litigation but rather a process of ongoing ethical reflection and practice. Ethical practices have been observed from the initial conception of this study and have been applied throughout engagement in the research process. Ethical issues were considered from the earliest framing of the research questions through to the construction of the methodology, and in some ways the ethical procedures have instilled integrity and discipline into the research process. For instance, in recruiting study participants, the researcher had to respect ethical issues

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[2] Ethics Application Number: **HRETH 12/290** approved by Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee.

around consent where the individual had to volunteer and sign a consent form before the interview process could begin. There were also strict rules around confidentiality and against the provision of incentives.

The question of 'what do I get out of this' arose whilst in the field, especially in the interviews with the village leaders - church ministers, village mayors, government women representatives and village chiefs. Normally before the formal interview process began, I would start a warming up conversation to get to know each other. The second phase of this conversation was explaining my reason for being at their place and the university procedures that I had to go through with them before we could start the actual interview. When I handed out the consent forms for their signature, questions would arise, although their interest in taking part remained high. They had clear expectations that some sort of reward would be given. I then had to explain again university procedures and that participation in this study was entirely voluntary. For some participants, I was asked to read the research information and also to sign the consent forms as well as them.

What I experienced in the field made me consider from an ethical standpoint whether the expectation of receiving some sort of reward was really a cultural norm or whether it came from previous experience. I then reflected back to the times when I was conducting work related surveys where the Samoan government had to provide food and transportation costs in exchange for information. Coming in as a student researcher and contributing nothing to the community is a real challenge. Looking back again to the concept of *Upega o Filiga* these questions posed during the fieldwork were one element that complicated the research process.

This experience raises a range of ethical questions. How do we as researchers deal with the power relations within indigenous communities? How do we deal with community expectations? Is it right/ethical to take away valuable possessions such as knowledge and information from people at the grassroots without giving something back? How and to what extent might formal procedures based on Australian cultural norms be changed or made more flexible?

***Talatalaga mai le malae*/tales from the field**

In anything that people do there are always good experiences- and bad. Hence the need for contingencies as the research may not go according to plan.

The timing of the fieldwork for early December 2012 was assumed to be perfect as government employees would be preparing for the festive season and more available for an interview. Instead the first interview was cancelled when Cyclone Evan decided to hit the Samoan islands. The house I was living in got blown away and for the three days the hurricane lasted I was more worried about finding refuge for my laptop, mini-recorder and all the paper work than worrying about my own safety. *Upega o Filiga* was no protection against the forces of nature. The whole country was devastated and many of the study participants were required for emergency work. All the interviews with government employees were rescheduled into a reduced timeframe and as a result when the interviews started I had to do four to five interviews a day and cover long distances in remote locations. Also because of the hurricane I was unable to access some of the government reports, publications, and newspaper articles that I wanted to collect to take back with me for later analysis.

I cannot deny the fact that I am very proud to be carrying out this research. I grew up as a young woman in a village on the south coast of Upolu in Samoa, commuted to and from the village to be educated in the capital city, and I have worked with and for Samoan women for many years. As a research student, I thought having worked for the advancement of women for so many years, knowing the government protocols, having established relationships and knowing the stakeholders would make my fieldwork much easier than it would be for a researcher from outside of Samoa. However, it was a mixed experience. Some people were very supportive but the majority were not. For example, one of my contact points was a social network made up of all the women chief executive officers. This network is active in promoting women in leadership, especially in politics. I was saddened when I followed up on the letters sent out to some of the female Chief Executive Officers whom were part of this advocacy group and the majority of them refused to be part of the study. Most of their responses were phrased along these lines *'….I am very sorry but I don't want to waste my valuable time taking part in your study. I have more important issues to attend to…..'* This response is taken

up in discussion later on about women's commitment to taking up women's issues themselves.

I was sad and it was hard to take the responses from these women CEOs knowing that part of their role was to mentor young women like myself so we have the courage to pursue leadership roles whether it be academic development or in the work force. Nevertheless, I needed to look at the bright side of things, be understanding and recognise that the women Chief Executive Officers at this point in time were still obligated to responding to after-effects of the cyclone. The interviews were then rescheduled for the beginning of the year. However, this also proved not to be a good time, as the women CEOs as well as other participants whom were invited were tied up with reviews and planning processes for another fiscal year.

My insider status was not acknowledged by some people who preferred to relate to the researcher as an outsider. The insider/outsider status was a mixed blessing – it facilitated the research in some ways but hindered it in other situations. This too will be considered further in the chapters to follow.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN IN THE *FAASAMOA*
'O AU O LE TAMAITAI SAMOA, O LE FEAGAIGA TAUSI, O LE SULI' [3]

The objective of this study is to look at the factors which contribute to the low representation of women in the Samoan parliament, and, in particular, the cultural factors which promote or constrain Samoan women's political representation. Given that culture is such a highly contested concept, this chapter concentrates on very specific aspects of the *faasamoa*/Samoan culture - the *feagaiga/*covenantal relationship between the sister and the brother, the inherited status of the Samoan woman as a family heir, and the sacred child/*tamasa*- and examines how those positioned within this structure have certain roles and responsibilities which impact on Samoan ideology around women's political representation. This chapter also provides necessary background information on the Samoan woman's role and her responsibilities as the sister/*feagaiga* and it draws conclusions based on the input from the twenty-one participants in this study. The implications of her role and these responsibilities for parliamentary participation are explicitly discussed in a later chapter.

Gender equality is understood by Jolly et al. (2015), in their UN discussion paper *Falling through the Net? Gender and social protection in the Pacific*, as the equal rights and responsibilities of women and men, girls and boys. This implies that the interest, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration. They see equality between the genders as not only a human rights issue but as a precondition for an indicator of sustainable people-centred development. This is the shared vision for gender equality. In making this vision a reality, many regions and countries have focused on the public dimensions of educational, economic and political capacity, where women are seeking equality with men. That means equal access to education and comparable outcomes at all levels, equality in employment, equal representation and equal participation in leadership in business, government, churches and civil society (p. 2). They indicate that the concept of women's active representation in politics is seen worldwide as one of the most important components for achieving gender equality.

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[3]'I am a Samoan Woman, a family heir, the Sacred Covenant.'

However, the literature on gender and development highlights the fact that women are under-represented in politics and leadership positions in almost all parts of the globe. Women's under-representation in politics is considered a violation of women's rights from a human rights perspective (Fraser and Kazantsis 1992), and measures have been put in place to enhance the development of women in almost all the countries of the world who are signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the fact remains that in most countries the full representation of women at all decision-making levels is a complicated concept.

In Samoa, where the development of women is paramount in the National Development framework, women's active participation in leadership roles and politics is highly regarded and culturally valued. Nevertheless, Samoa is still listed by the United Nations as one of the countries with a very low representation of women in leadership and public decision-making positions (Ministry of Women 2001). This listing by the UNCEDAW committee is based on standards measured in numeric terms. The Samoan government in its last two periodic reports to the UNCEDAW committee argues that these numeric standards do not adequately reflect the status of women in Samoa, and that the government and the people of Samoa strongly believe that in the Samoan culture men and women are equal (Ministry of Women Community and Social Development 2009b, p. 18). Zetlin (2014) in 'Women in parliaments in the Pacific region' supports the high value that the Samoan Government places on its culture and argues that the problem of culture with reference to the under-representation of women in politics is assumed to be an indigenous problem. She points out that the literature lags behind current theoretical scholarship on the interaction of culture with other sources of identity. Zetlin suggests that understanding the origin of women's exclusion is important and ultimately demands the recovery of the narrative truth of both traditional cultures and the imposed cultures of missionisation and colonialism. This should be accomplished not through an understanding of traditional and contemporary culture as opposed and self-contained, but rather by acknowledging that cultural influences intersect with other influences in dynamic ways that can be productive or destructive of the empowerment of women (pp. 256–257).

Most people value their culture, their beliefs and values as well as the cultural protocols. For Samoans, it is their culture which affords women a higher, more prestigious status than men. One of the fieldwork participants clearly reflected this view:

> *…myself and people I know and I grew up with, there was no inequality there. If anything, if anything we were a bit superior to the boys, in the way our families treated us. …….If anything I think the balance was weighed very much in favour of the girls growing up… there is sort of more inequality in terms of how boys are treated* (Participant 8, Interviewed 21.01.2013).

The dominant literature on gender and development, politics and feminism identifies 'culture' as one of the main contributing factors to the low representation of women in politics. The negative view of the role of culture, evident in much of the literature, was not evident in the comments from the participants in this study.

In the literature review, I argued that eventhough most of the writings on feminism locate and acknowledge the role of culture, there has been very little focus on traditional cultures, where the culture is not a negative force. In the Samoan context, the traditional culture, the *faasamoa*, is something that acknowledges and embraces women and that could be used to further enhance their political participation. This chapter analyses the *faasamoa* with a particular emphasis on the value of women as the sister (*feagaiga*) and sacred child (*tamasa*). It also introduces some of the factors that impact on and contradict the traditional beliefs, and how these factors may alter the current perception of the status of women in Samoan society today.

The concept of culture has a long and complex history. According to Raymond Williams (1976), 'culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language' (Williams 1976, p.6). This chapter confines the discussion to those aspects of the conceptualisation of culture that are relevant to the issue of women's under-representation in Samoa. In the literature review chapter I referred to Rathje's (2009) definition of culture as uniformity within a social system, ethnicity or nationality, a commonly spoken language, norms and values. Chan Mow's definition, cited in Soo's publication 'Changes in the Matai System: *O Suiga i le Faamatai*, The *Faamatai* in the face of the Winds of Change', agrees with Rathje's definition, but it is

specifically for the Samoan culture/*faasamoa*: 'the framework of action based upon the social structure practices of Samoan customs and Samoan culture, and the *matai* system as the hierarchical system of authority around which Samoan society is organised' (Soo 2007, p. 119).

Faasamoa/culture in the Samoan context

The discussion that follows introduces key aspects of Samoan culture with a more detailed analysis of the cultural processes mentioned by Chan Mow (2015). Specifically, it assesses where women actually stand in the Samoan culture before exploring the claims that culture is one of the factors contributing to women's low participation in politics. The discussion is guided by the following questions*: Is there an indigenous Samoan perspective that justifies the position of women? What do the interviews in this study tell us about the different ways that the status of women is understood in Samoa today?*

Culture is commonly defined as 'the dominant values of a society, the entire way of life of a human community, or shared values and beliefs of a community' (Maidment and Mackerras 1998). However, even the definition of Samoan culture remains highly contested. Samoan scholar, Emma Kruse Vaai has attempted to define Samoan culture as *faasamoa/*the Samoan way (Vaai 2011). The word *faasamoa* is made up of two words, *faa* and *samoa*. The word *faa* is a Samoan prefix that can be translated as 'the ways of' and Samoa is the name of the country hence the translation by Vaai (2011) and some interviewees which will be quoted later on as the 'Samoan way. Tagaloa, as reported by Lawson (Lawson 1996), argued that this term *faasamoa*/Samoan way is used more generally by outsiders/*papalagi* (Europeans) but Samoans, when discussing their culture amongst themselves, use the term *faamatai/*chiefly system. According to Tagaloa, the concept *faasamoa* lacks real substance whereas the *faamatai* is understood and known to Samoans as the ideal social system that reflects in a meaningful way their actual social experience on a daily basis (Lawson 1996, p. 152). Tagaloa's argument implies that the *faamatai* is somehow very specific and confined to a specific community. Not only that but the implication is that one has to be born into or be part of a Samoan group to be able to fully understand and define what culture really means for Samoans. These definitions suggest that there is a cultural meaning and explanation to

all that is going on in Samoan society. Tagaloa's argument here reinforces Mohanty's view that in any cross-cultural feminist work there must be attention to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes (Mohanty 2003a, p. 501)

Some of the participants in this study support Tagaloa's definition of Samoan culture:

> *Personally I define the faasamoa/Samoan culture as the faamatai, the social system that recognises and summarises the way the Samoans live on a daily basis, how the society is structured and how the individuals relate to each other. So it refers to the values, the beliefs, the roles and responsibilities, language etc...And no Samoan can live individually, everybody is part of this system. We often say that those who want to impose changes on this system are outcast or those who want to become someone that they can't be.* (Participant 18, Interviewed 28.01.2013).

Another participant defines culture as the way Samoans operate, their manner of doing things, their manner of living on an everyday basis. Culture is looking at the relationships between different people and how they connect and interact on a daily basis:

> *I would define culture as simply how I connect with my folks, my parents, siblings, myself to my wife and children, my extended family, how I manage my resources and how to fulfil my obligations within my family, my village and the church. It is simply the way I live my life according to the laws of the land...and with regards to this specific study, women are prestigious in this culture, in this system. As you are aware and I take myself as an example I call my sisters 'o au feagaiga'/they are my sisters but there is more to that than just calling them my sisters. The outsiders will never understand what I mean here fully, only the Samoans do. All Samoans understand correctly when we men say 'O au feagaiga' we refer to our obligation as men and our duties with respect to the brother and sister covenantal relationship....and that is what I meant when I said it is a way of connecting and how I relate to people around me* (Participant 7, Interviewed 21.01.2013).

The definitions from these two participants clearly support authors like Chan Mow (2015), Rathje (2009) and others quoted above. However, this one participant suggests something very specific about the *faasamoa* and that is the place of Samoan women within the culture in a specific aspect which the discussion will take up. In addition, the discussion in this section provides a clear definition and an understanding of the concept *faasamoa/*Samoan way. The understanding as quoted from the field, clearly illustrates that even though the interviews were conducted in Samoan, there were no tensions or assumption that the word *faasamoa* was misinterpreted or misunderstood. The interviewees quoted in this study both understood and refer to the *faamatai/*chiefly system as 'the Samoan way'; namely, the social system that recognises and summarises the way the Samoans live on a daily basis, how the society is structured and how the individuals relate to each other.

*Faamatai/*chiefly system

In chapter five, I refer to Fairbairn-Dunlop's definition of the *faamatai/*chiefly system as 'the sociometric wheel on which the Samoan society turns' (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1996, p. 172). Soo (2007) provides a much more detailed explanation of it as 'to do with the *matai'* where he goes through the *matai* attributes and the *matai* responsibilities, decision-making processes, rank, genealogy and associated history, protocols, method of communication, elite language and method of election. According to Soo, certain basic elements constitute the *faamatai*: *suafa* (title), *fanua* (lands pertaining to that title), a house site (*tulaga maota* for *alii,* or *laoa* for *tulafale), faalupega* (honorific salutation), *aumaga* (leading untitled men associated with the title) and a *tamaitai matua* (leading female descendant in the society or among the village women associated with the title) (Soo 2007, p.10).

Returning to Fairbairn-Dunlop, she talks about 'a conceptual division of the village in which women were the holders and transmitters of *mana/*sacred power, while men held the secular power or *pule'* (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1991, p. 172). According to Fairbairn-Dunlop, in the context of the time (and Fairbairn-Dunlop is looking back fifty or sixty years), sacred and secular domains were of equal importance and consequently represented equal opportunities for status enhancement. Soo (2007) expands Fairbairn-

Dunlop's view and argues that the *faamatai* is not just a socio-political system with its established structures and a mode of operation under the leadership of a *matai* (chief), but it is also an encompassing system in that it is a way of life and a way of doing things. In Soo's view, eventhough the *faamatai* revolves around a *matai* it provides the focal point that brings together in an orderly manner all the members of families, villages and Samoa as a nation (Soo 2007, p. 11).

The above debate on the *faamatai* highlights some significant points. The first is the concept that Samoa is a highly defined and structured society whose individual members know where they belong. They value and respect the structural processes, for these define their existence as Samoans. The other even more interesting point is that, within this highly structured society, Samoan women still hold a prestigious status with its own specific roles and responsibilities. In Latai's (2014) article 'From Open *Fale* to Mission Houses: Negotiating the Boundaries of "Domesticity" in Samoa' she discusses the belief that the Samoan woman is a *tamasa/*sacred offspring. This valuation as sacred determines the woman's status and roles within the family. Latai explains further that the Samoan woman is the *feagaiga*, which is translated as 'covenant'. This refers to the sacred covenant of respect between a brother and a sister where the brother gives special honour to his sister (p 303). The strength of this belief was confirmed by the majority of my study participants who stated that 'Samoan women do have a place in the *faasamoa*'. As one of the participants proudly declared:

> *I am really proud to be a woman in Samoa, because I know the opportunities are here for me, if I want* (Participant 16, Interviewed 25.01.2013).

Another participant clearly indicated where women fit in the *matai* system/*faasamoa*:

> *I strongly believe that the chiefly system is very fair, and I don't know of any other culture like the faamatai/faasamoa. Ever since I was born I have been treated as princess and there is not a day where my brother and other extended members of the family haven't implemented their part of the deal in the feagaiga concept where they promised that they will serve me as the sister. I have been asked many times to take family titles however I have deferred them to my brothers in honour of their daily service and protection. I am also well aware*

that no one can stop me from having a chiefly title (Participant 12, Interviewed 12.12.2012).

This particular participant's view suggests that she understands her position as an individual in the *faamatai*, and that her rights as a family heir give her the opportunity as a woman to decide freely on matters concerning her development and on matters concerning how she relates to others around her and to her environment. With reference to politics, the participant's statement also suggests she is aware of her rights as a *tamaitai Samoa*/Samoan woman.

The final decision whether to take up politics as a career involves broader cultural issues, gender perceptions and family priorities such as motherhood. One of the participants clarifies this:

> *However I think women have different priorities, I think that is where it stems from. We will get as far as this level, the level where we are in government now, there's many women CEOs, heads of government Corporations but it's just that next step to representation in parliament we are not interested in it. Our priorities are different, we prioritise our families, I think that is where, it's not a matter of we can't get into parliament, it's because we don't run for politics in the first place, because we are not interested.....We can run if we want to....*(Participant 8, Interviewed 21.01.2013).

These statements again support the Samoan ideology that women and men have equal access to political participation, and that this access is through the chiefly system. This echoes Jolly and Ram's (1998) argument that women's choices to participate in anything are not based on one single factor but rather a holistic overview of life.

However the participants later on do talk about a single factor, that of the needs of their families:

> *…any woman would choose their children, their families above all that, women would choose to look after their families, put food on the table, educate their children than taking a career that is very expensive.....* (Participant 7, Interviewed 21.01.2013)

…we are not interested in it, our priorities are different, we prioritise our families, you know, it's not a matter of we can't get into parliament, it's because we don't run for parliament in the first place because we are not interested...(Participant 8, Interviewed 21.01.2013)

…women are very practical; they would not spend their resources on doing campaigning rather on their children and family, so if you see the women that do come through, except for myself, they are older women, those who have gone through the child rearing stage… (Participant 8, Interviewed 22.01.2013).

A few of the other study participants disagreed, arguing that, at the village level, men and women are not equal. These participants referred to Samoa's social structure as the '*Tafatolu o le Tofamanino*' (three spheres of the Samoan philosophical view of existence), documented by Aiono Fanaafi Le Tagaloa(1997). These spheres are the *alii ma faipule/*council of chiefs at the top of the triangle with the *saoao* and *tamaitai*/village daughters and *aumaga*/untitled men or sons of the village as the lower part of the triangle. According to these participants, in the village setting, there are the village of chiefs/council of chiefs and the village of the village daughters, and these two villages in the past had equal power. In their experience not many villages now practise this equality. In their view, this was probably how it was in the past and it makes for a logical argument for equality between men and women, but they believe that it is probably many years since this was the case and such practices have been phased out. People's behaviour and attitudes have changed over the years, and so the power dynamics have changed. These study participants argued strongly that the *alii* and *faipule*/Council of Chiefs, who are also the title holders in the chiefly system, are now situated on the top of the triangle, and that the power dynamics and power relations between these three spheres are no longer equal. Therefore women and men are no longer equal.

… in the village council it's not equal, because the council of women will in the end defer to the council of chiefs for the final decision. So in terms of power relations, it's

> *not equal, the white house which is the council of chiefs holds the*
> *power…..*(Participant 6, Interviewed 21.01.2013).

One other participant supported the view that women do not have the same opportunities as men:

> *For instance, when you look at opportunities for becoming a matai we know there*
> *are fewer women matai because families generally favour the men because they*
> *perceive men as being more able to provide for the family. Families appoint their*
> *matai to enhance the status of their families, to enhance their economic, financial,*
> *food security as a way of providing for the family. According to this view, men are*
> *better able to provide than women. In addition, because men are physically strong,*
> *they are viewed as being the better providers. It's as if there is a primitive instinct*
> *that still operates today. Women are therefore the ones that have to prove*
> *themselves* (Participant 3, Interviewed 12.12.2012).

This participant continued by illustrating her opinion with observations about the village:

> *Not totally, I have never really lived in a village but I have spoken to a lot of folks*
> *and you know my brother is a 'title T' (One of the paramount well known chiefly*
> *titles in Samoa) and he claims that women are equally involved in decision making*
> *processes but that is at a second level. He says the council of chiefs meets first then*
> *they go and talk to the women… he says oh we always consult the women,*
> (Participant 3, Interviewed 12.12.2012).

This participant respected her brother's perception, but she also felt strongly that it was not good enough. She then continued:

> *I have also spoken to some of the women there, chief M's wife. She said women*
> *should not, women should not, I have asked WHY? She said we should not because*
> *our village has always been like this and these are the things that we always do, and*

this is how we have done it all along. It's okay, it's good, that's the mindset. She doesn't appreciate; well I mean I can't argue against that unless we can convince women and men that there is a role for both in partnership. We can't really go up and say: oh you should have women matais, we just can't do that but that is the mindset in this village (Participant 3, Interviewed 12.12.2012).

It is clear from these interview excerpts that people have different opinions on gender equality in Samoa. Different factors are at play here. One of the participants commented: *If the women feel that there is nothing wrong with them being the second party, then why make noise.* This comment will be taken up again later on in chapters four and five.

Other participants were not really sure whether men and women are equal or not. This uncertainty was evident when some answered at the start of the interview that men and women are not equal but then later explained that, in the context of the *suli*/heir, there is no question that Samoan men and women have equal rights and equal access to participate in all spheres of the *faasamoa.* The most senior and the longest serving woman in Samoan politics suggested that '*in any matter or issue investigated we need to dig deep and find out what the rationale is, for what we are looking at.*'(Fiame. Naomi: During an interview conducted on 23rd August, 2013). From the discussion so far, it is clear that in the *faamatai* which is the entry point to politics, women and men have equal rights to access.

Spatial relationship/*va*

I referred earlier to Phillips and Ilcan's (2000) definition of space - *va* - as boundaries or distinctions that are culturally and technically produced and therefore always embody particular relational meanings. I also alluded to the definition of the concept of spatial domestication, as the process that ranks, orders, tames and monitors spatial domains such as households, rural settings, market towns, informal and formal economies, industrial factories and the people that engage with them (Phillips and Ilcan 2000, p. 206). The concept of *va/*space is considered crucial in the everyday life of every individual, as it is the core of the *faasamoa* and considered key to determining people's actions and behaviour towards other people and the environment. It is the key 'taming'

factor that keeps peace and stability within Samoan families, villages and society as a whole. Space in the Samoan context is what Matlock and Matthews (2011) refer to as 'social distance' because it can influence decisions made by social groups, including choices related to leadership positions and roles. One of the study participants described this using a Samoan proverb *'O Samoa ua uma ona tofi, ua taoto ae o se alaoo'* literally translated 'Samoa is already structured, like a well-designed pathway from the start until the end' (Participant 16, Interviewed 28.01.2013). By this the participant meant that all Samoans, from the leaders to the children, know and understand their place, their responsibilities and their roles in keeping society together. The cultural values of *faaaloalo*/respect, *alofa*/love, *lotofoai*/giving heart, *faautauta*/carefulness are the basic elements that distinguish these interpersonal boundaries.

There are two relationships in particular that are relevant here -the relationship between the chief and his family members, and the relationship between the sister and brother, the *feagaiga*. Huffer (2006) and Soo's and Fraenkel (2005) research emphasised that in the face of increasing global uncertainty and growing socio-economic inequalities, the concept of *vafealoai* (spatial relations) needs to be thoroughly defined and analysed so as to avoid misconceptions from a western perspective about indigenous cultures like the *faasamoa*.

Va o le tuagane ma le tuafafine/**The space between sister and brother**

 I referred earlier to Tagaloa's (1997) description of Samoan women as the most highly valued status group in the village, because they hold and transmit sacred power/*mana*. In the Samoan society their brothers always refer to them for final approval before any decision is enacted. According to Tagaloa the essence of this status is detailed and exemplified in the bond between sister and brother, the relationship known to Samoans as the sacred covenant or *feagaiga*. I also referred earlier to Latai's (2014) explanation of the *feagaiga* as the sacred covenant of respect between a brother and a sister which gives special honour to the sister. In this relationship the brother is obligated to serve and protect his sister. Not only that but as the sacred child, the sister's curse is something to be feared. So the brother's service/*tautua* is vital and must please his sister (Latai 2014).The participants in my study stated that the *feagaiga* relationship is founded on the values of *faaaloalo*/respect, *va/*relational space between people,

*vafealoai/*respectful space, *vafesootai/*connecting space, va*fetufaai/*sharing space, *vatapuia*/sacred space and *vafefaasoaai*/consultative space. The participants believe that these core values are instilled in both parties and indeed form the basis for their daily lives. All matters relating to the welfare of the family are to be discussed and agreed upon by both parties. This crucial relationship was explained in detail by one of the participants:

> *In the eyes of the faasamoa (Samoan culture) woman is the sacred covenant: 'Feagaiga Tausi pe o le Tama Sa' this means once a baby girl is born in a family, every family member's job is to nurture and protect her. All the elderly women of the extended family prioritise looking after this girl, protect and care for her BECAUSE she is the covenant. They will care, protect and look after her until she marries. Then they can let her go.*

> *She is every family member's priority; she is the person who eats second after the family chief. She sits in the front of the house; her responsibility is the inside of the house not outside. The men's responsibility is to serve and to care for this sacred child. Her male siblings protect (faapelepele)/care for her with utmost respect and love, hence the phrase 'ioimata' (apple of the eye)* (Participant 2, Interviewed 13.12.2012).

It is worth coming back to Fairbairn-Dunlop's (1996) explanation of women's position as *feagaiga* which, she believes, guarantees women equal rights with their brothers. The sisters are given the title of *taupou*/ceremonial virgin, the Samoan feminine status which is equivalent to the chiefly titles bestowed upon the brothers. These ascribed statuses come with assigned responsibilities, where women, according to Tagaloa (1997), are known as the healers, teachers, the priestesses, makers of wealth and the peacemakers. In contrast, men were the sister's protector, the decision-maker and the spokesperson for the family and were given responsibility for all the heavy duties such as cultivating the land, building, and being warriors.

This participant further explains the f*eagaiga* concept and the dynamics of this powerful relationship:

The sister in the faasamoa is referred to as the feagaiga. The concept feagaiga refers to the taboo relationship between the sister and the brother, which we called feagaiga or covenant. Mind you this relationship has taboos and it ties in with the two parties' responsibilities. The sister gets the brother's respect and service. The fulfilment of the two parties' obligation towards this covenantal relationship is reflected in their responsibilities. If I may call it the division of labour in Samoa, you know authority and power are seen as men's responsibility, but with decisions pertaining to family matters, the chiefs will ask for the sister's consent or the sister's approval. The role of the sister as the feagaiga was very important and highly regarded in the past. If you refer back to her roles and responsibilities, it reflects the honour and the respect that the entire family bestows on her, the respect and the service she gets from her brothers.

These were orally transmitted; we grew up learning from our forebears, grandmothers or grand aunties about our roles as the feagaiga tausi, an aiga/family covenant. Our role as the feagaiga was very crucial in our lineage continuation, peacemaking, and many other things, and our oral history reflects that. We as women were powerful in the olden days; our brothers had to be careful with serving us because the consequences for them were either death or infertility. (Participant 1, Interviewed 11.12.2012)

Va o le Matai ma lona au aiga/The space between the family chief and family members

The relationship between the family chief and the family members is one of the most crucial relationships in the structure of Samoan society. The same principles and values apply as in the sister and brother relationship. Once a Samoan, whether male or female, is given the honour to be the chief of the family, all family members are expected to serve and respect him or her. Moreover, it is widely believed that all the responsibilities that exist for the sister and the brother are tested in this family setting. So it is the responsibility of the family chief to oversee all the family assets and all the family members, but the main priority is to look after and protect the sister. It is also

understood that it is the *matai*'s role to mentor and encourage women to take up leadership positions within the community. Part of the family chief's mentoring role is to encourage the *feagaiga*/sister to take up chiefly titles. This was illustrated by one of the participants in his interview:

From my experience as a paramount chief living and overseeing my family, the family and the extended family relationships are very important. The life and death, nurturing and honouring the covenantal relationship between the sister and the brother relies heavily upon the family. The feagaiga in the family context will not be the responsibility of just the brother or the matai but the whole extended family.

So the protection of the sister will be done collectively. Part of this bond's criteria in my opinion, is the role of the chief and his family in mentoring the sister to be the family leader in the future. How is this done? In my opinion and how I am doing things with my sisters, I allow my sisters to have the same privileges as myself in obtaining chiefly titles. I bestow titles upon them......I then share with them everything that they need to know about being a family leader....and as articulated in a few studies one of the things that prevents women from accepting chiefly titles is the inability to be fluent orators. I will teach them oratory skills and knowledge (Participant 2, Interviewed 13.12.2012).

One of the other study participants talked about a different aspect, that Samoan women are stigmatised because of their gender. His example was the number of court cases between brothers and sisters, which question the sister's rights to property, to land and titles. In this regard he reiterated and stressed the importance of the relationship between the chief and his family. In this participant's view, the relationship between the chief and his family is the second most important covenantal relationship within the Samoan culture. If the chief and the extended family respect the space between them, their mutual relationship, in all ways, then the chief will look after the extended family well and the extended family will respond with great service, and will honour and fully respect the family chief. He further developed this point by stating that if this relationship is firm, and there is mutual trust amongst all, things are easily arranged. For

instance, if the sister wants to become a chief, the family chief can easily grant her wish and bestow the family title.

> *The relationship between the chief and his family is known as the second most important covenantal relationship within the faasamoa/Samoan culture. If this relationship is firmly harnessed then all the sisters' wants and needs will be easily granted. This is because we all know that there are people who are arguing and stating that women as sisters/feagaiga don't have the right to hold matai titles just because of their biological orientation as women. However I feel if the relationship between the chief and his extended family is firm then the chief will just grant the title or fully support his sisters. This would be through bestowing chiefly titles upon them and through mentoring them to become effective, efficient and active leaders in the future* (Participant 12, Interviewed 16.01.2013).

The point made by Phillips and Ilcan (2000) about the importance of the spatial relationship in determining people's actions and behaviour towards other people is clearly supported by the discussion on these two spatial relationships. They are crucial for understanding the concepts involved when discussing Samoan women's eligibility for politics or access to decision-making opportunities in general.

On the other hand, five of the participants suggested that, in principle, the relationship between the chief and his extended family should be based on mutual respect and reciprocity. However not all families are the same: some families are very close, some are not. For the families that trust each other and have a lot of faith in the women, their women have been granted family titles and are performing well.

> *I've seen, actually most that I know that have titles are doing a really good job. Like the role of bringing the family together, the role of dealing with the affairs of the families and things like that. From the perspective of the responsibilities that they are doing, I think they are doing a better job than the other men I know. But again different families have different perceptions and different ways of doing things….Circumstances are also different and I know some that have bestowed titles upon their sisters/women because there are no men and they*

have gladly taken that up, whilst in some families, if a sister is chosen, the sister will have her husband take the title. This is out of the sister's respect for the husband's service for the family. (Participant 13, Interviewed 17.01.2013).

Division of labour

In chapter one of this study, I referred to Kabeer's (1994) definition of the division of labour, 'gender relations and social relations that create and reproduce systematic differences in the positioning of women and men in relation to institutional processes and outcomes'. In Kabeer's view, these power relations block women's capacity to participate in and influence development processes. Kabeer's definition highlights the nature of the changes which serve to promote such capacity at both individual and collective level. She shows that many attempts to change gendered power relations have failed, for a variety of reasons. Kabeer sees these gender relations as being interwoven into the broader set of social relations, structuring the division of resources and responsibilities, claims and obligations between different social groups of women and men within any given society. Kabeer focuses particularly on the differences between the public and private domain, how these terms are understood in different parts of the world and where the women's sphere lies within these domains.

In addition to Kabeer's focus on the public/private distinction, Stevens (2007) argues that the sexual division of labour helps explain the way in which modern societies have evolved, especially when considering the enhancement of the political status of women in most developing and developed countries. Stevens further contends that the traditional division of labour confines women largely to the domestic sphere and to the reproduction and nurturing of children as their primary role, while generally affording to men a much greater share of both power and resources.

Pacific writers like Tongamoa (1988) and Fairbairn-Dunlop (1996) argue that the division of labour between the sexes in the Pacific islands societies is the most influential factor in defining the status of Pacific women. As Cox (1996) says, this division of labour could be viewed as an act of 'power over' women because women's unpaid work and domestic duties do not count when it comes to decision making and

deciding who has the power (p. 29). Cox believes that this needs to change as women have so much to offer for the benefit of the whole society.

Fairbairn-Dunlop (1991) presents a different perspective and argues that any analysis of women's work must also include examination of ideologies of gender which articulate within themselves the sexual division of labour. She argues that the experiences of women in the developing world can never be explained solely in terms of gender, as is claimed in much of the women and development literature, nor solely in terms of global economic relations as is claimed in much of the economic development literature. Fairbairn-Dunlop, like Mohanty (2003a), challenges the idea that the position of women in Europe can be taken as the overarching situation for women worldwide.

The majority of the study participants did not agree with Stevens' (2007) and Cox's (1996) arguments that the division of labour makes decision making a male responsibility and an act of male power while confining women largely to the domestic sphere. The participants believed that the division of labour in the Samoan context is based on the principle that the individual family members have a role to play in order to contribute to the welfare and well-being of their family. According to their interviews, the division of labour does not show intent to create power gaps or power relations between the two genders or to degrade the position of women in society. As one participant explained, the division of labour as it is, is very fair and if there is anyone to complain it should be the men. This is because the division of labour in the Samoan context allocates only light tasks to women while the men take all the heavy duties. This participant went on to explain that the decision making process must be understood in order to analyse it appropriately. According to her, eventhough men have decision making responsibilities, the women are consulted and in fact have the last say before any decision is enacted or implemented. The study participants explained that, to Samoans, the responsibilities assigned to women are known as light work, whilst the men are given all the hard tasks. In their opinion, if there is any inequality in the division of labour, it is in favour of the women.

> *The division of labour is very fair, every single person has to contribute to the welfare of the family, not just to sit pretty and expect to be fed..* (Participant 4, Interviewed 19.01.2013).

According to Latai (2014) the distinction of inner and outer responsibilities differs from the Western segregation into a feminised domestic sphere and a masculinised public sphere. In Samoa, the woman honoured as the *feagaiga* refrains from doing the heavy tasks that are her brother's responsibility. In Latai's view, the Samoan gender division of labour is equal and complementary as opposed to the hierarchical nature of the Western segregation where the public sphere is seen to eclipse the domestic sphere (Latai 2014, p. 304). This is a very important distinction.

Moreover several of the study participants argued that in the context of the feagaiga concept, the sister is not given any of the heavy responsibilities because of the brother's respect and commitment to the *feagaiga* relationship where the brother has promised to do all the hard work, whilst his sister oversees things within the house. In their opinion, Samoan men were originally tasked with decision-making roles based on the nature of the job. In other words, decision making has to do with the security, wellbeing and welfare of the family, where men are the ones to deal with maintaining land and chiefly titles, as well as fighting battles if they have to, in order to protect their families. According to these cultural directives, the sister is to be consulted on any decision, and in fact no decision is enacted unless the sisters approve.

This study participant was one of the few who really explained in detail the roles and responsibilities of the brother and sister:

> *Traditionally we grew up knowing that these are the roles of the women and these are the roles of the men...... Samoans consider the work done by Samoan women as light works such as tidying the house, weaving the mats and preparing the handicraft, washing the dishes and doing the washing, while men do the heavy work like fishing, making and maintaining the plantation, providing for the family, protecting and nurturing all the family's assets and belongings as well as protecting the wellbeing of the whole family. Decision making is considered a heavy duty and relates to men's tasks of protecting the wellbeing and welfare of the family* (Participant 4, Interviewed 14.12.2012)

Study participants blamed the low number of women *matai* as one of the reasons for the under representation of women in politics.

> *The issue of the under representation of women in politics is more complex than the division of labour and others discussed earlier, the issue is to do with the faasamoa and how we do things. What I mean by that is, we ask ourselves the question 'What does a woman need to do, need to have in order to get into parliament?' We all know that the electoral act states that only those with registered matai titles are entitled to candidacy for election...and that is all that matters... Now if you look at the statistics, tell me how many of the total population are women, and then ask what percentage of those women are chiefs, then continue to asking the question, what percentage of the matai population in Samoa are women matais? I am right, only 11% of the matai population are women....only 11%... So there goes the huge difference. Therefore we need to ensure first the number of women matai are the same as the number of men who are matai* (Participant 16, Interviewed 25.01.2013).

Another participant had the same view:

> *It is very simple, the number of women are well below the number of men in parliament because there are not many women who are chiefs. If we want more or equal number of women with men in politics then we need to fix that issue before looking at fixing the number of women in politics. If you ask me why there is the low number or very few women matai there are.......?? Well there are many reasons, first Samoan families are used to the practice of awarding chiefly titles to the men. Another reason is that most families don't trust the women's potential and lastly I think it's just bad men's politics where they (men) want to dominate things* (Participant 9, Interviewed 30.01.2013)

These two participants went on to explain some of the reasons for the low number of women *matai*/chiefs. The practice of rewarding men with chiefly titles has become a norm, which is later misinterpreted as the *faasamoa*. Rather this is done with the understanding that it shows respect to the men for keeping their part of the covenant, for

fulfilling their obligations arising from the sister and brother relationship known as *feagaiga/*covenant. The two participants also feel that other families lack trust in their women and base their arguments for not selecting women matai on assumptions. These other families fail to realise their responsibility to nurture their women so that they are able to take on any challenges in life.

On the other hand, the majority of the study participants disagreed with this interpretation, stating that in the Samoan context the *feagaiga* concept itself is the explanation. These participants argued that the opportunity is there for Samoan women to be *matai*, but, in the *feagaiga* concept, the sister is the pupil of the brother's eye. So the sister's status as the *feagaiga* is paramount and if she decides to take up a position as *matai*, then she will have to forgo her status as the *feagaiga* and she will have to take on all the heavy masculine tasks in order to serve the family.

Tongamoa (1988) argues that the perspective around the division of labour has changed since contact with western culture. Educated Pacific women have begun to question and reject the sexual division of labour as unfair, degrading and biased against women. It is seen as denying equal rights to women, thus continuously affirming their inferiority and subordination to men. To Tongamoa (1988) this change has taken place to varying degrees in Pacific societies and it correlates with the extent of western influences through formal education, wage employment, the mass media, overseas travel, exposure to modern technologies, increased use of contraceptives and long term planning by families and parents.

Most of the participants in this study agreed that things have changed around women's status and responsibilities, and that attitudes towards both the division of labour and women in politics have changed as well. Nevertheless, the majority of these participants maintained that the division of labour in the *faasamoa* is fair, and does not degrade or undermine the status of women. As explained earlier, the spatial relationships come with ascribed responsibilities. According to this view, the division of labour in the Samoan context is not a difference in status or an indication of any power dynamic between the individuals, but rather an obligation to fulfil one's commitment within the partnership relationship, with the understanding that all family members have roles to play in upholding the wellbeing and welfare of the family. Nevertheless as this chapter

has shown the perceptions and interpretations around the division of labour in the Samoan context have some impact in the selection processes for a family title. The statistics presented earlier make it obvious that most families favour men and this leads to the low number of women in politics.

These concepts will be further elaborated when discussing the processes Samoan women go through in order to engage in national politics and also community decision making processes.

CHAPTER 4

CHRISTIANITY: THE CONVERSION FROM THE *FEAGAIGA* TO THE WIFE/MOTHER

The last chapter looked at the status of Samoan women within the Samoan culture and how that affects their participation in decision making processes. This chapter continues by looking at Christianity as an adopted culture and how it influences the gender interpretation of Samoan women's participation in politics.

Whilst I was in Samoa collecting data for this study, I took part in activities of my church, witnessed gatherings of my family, and observed village occasions in my village. In my research role as participant observer, I was interested in the role of women in the various celebrations.

The photographs below show the different roles that women play in church activities. Figures 1 and 2 were taken during our church's taalolo/traditional gift presentation at the opening of our village's new church building. The Samoan woman dressed in traditional attire fills the traditional woman's role as the taupou/ceremonial virgin. It is her responsibility, as the leader and the honoured one, to guide her village or family delegation on these ceremonial occasions. Each piece of the costume worn has a cultural meaning about the Samoan woman's status, the honour and the respect that her family, congregation and her whole village bestows upon her.

Figure 1

Figure 2

The two photographs illustrate one of Samoa's well known sayings – *'E o faatasi le aganuu ma le faakerisiano'*, 'Culture goes hand in hand with Christianity'. An alternative translation is 'Christianity is highly regarded because of the *faasamoa* and vice-versa'. The photographs show that, eventhough this is a church activity, the

Samoan woman as the *taupou/*ceremonial virgin and *feagaiga*/sister still performs her duty as the *feagaig*a. the one who concludes all the traditional protocols and carries the honour and reputation of the entire family in all cultural and traditional ceremonies.This reaffirms the belief that it is the *faasamoa*which confers on Christianity the prestige, the high respect and high regard that it receives in Samoan society.

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figures 3 and 4 above depict my church's preparation for our congregation's end of year fundraising activity for the maintenance of our church building. These photographs showcase the defined roles for women within the daily operations of the church. The men, husbands and fathers in Figure 4 are sitting at the open back of the *fale/*house deciding how the programme should run, whilst the women in Figure 3 are all outside

weeding and ensuring that the houses and the entire church compound are clean and up to standard.

In contrast to Figures 1 and 2, these photographs portray the role of women in the church today, a role which mainly revolves around the domestic sphere. Even though these photos were taken during church activities, they represent the different roles women play within Samoan society. These photographs illustrate the argument of this chapter, namely that certain aspects of the *faasamoa,* which enhance the position of women and could be used to improve rates of political participation, particularly the value of women as the sister/*feagaiga* and sacred child/*tamasa*, have been diminished by the impact of Christianity and colonisation. The stories behind the photographs together with the stories collected through the interviews will frame the central argument of this chapter that Christianity is one of the contributing factors to the current interpretation of gender and its negative impact on women's political representation. Under the influence of the church, the Samoan woman has changed her perception of her traditional status from the role of the *tamaitai* as the sister/*feagaiga* to concentrating on being a good wife and a good mother.

Introduction

European contact with the first settlers of the Pacific islands did not occur in a cultural vacuum. The original inhabitants already possessed all the necessary societal machinery to regulate their lives. However, when the Europeans made contact with the Pacific islands they brought with them their own ways of life alongside a determination to impose these ways on the original inhabitants. Choi and Jolly edited book *Divine Domesticities Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific* refers to the European missionaries whose aim in the Pacific was to create Christian homes, and the sensuous beauty of a new way of materialising and embodying domestic life which was not a simple matter of transmission and acceptance. (Choi and Jolly, 2014. p. 3). It is the belief of some writers, theorists and anthropologists that this cultural imposition is the cause for many of the issues that the Pacific islands are experiencing today. Lawson (1996) indeed argues that the distinctions evident in the socio-political make up of Pacific island countries like Samoa and Tonga have been shaped very significantly by the timing and nature of contact with Europeans, with the explorers, traders and

missionaries, and that the implications that flow from this must therefore be understood in this light (Lawson 1996, p. 120). European contact brought changes in how Samoan women dress, in how they view their roles in Samoan society and in how Samoan society views women, and what they should do and what they should not do.

Despite the influence of the many European actors that Lawson (1996) mentions, Pokawin (1987) believes that Christianity brought by the missionaries was the most effective tool of colonisation in the Pacific region. However, Lawson (1996) disagrees with this view arguing that some of the cultural processes were not greatly disturbed by Christianity. Meleisea (1987) shares this conclusion with Lawson and points out that some of the things such as the high chiefly titles that carried great prestige did not disappear with Christianity (Meleisea 1987, p. 63). Rather Christianity became part of the *faasamoa* and was used, like the old religion, to legitimise its institutions (Meleisea 1987, p. 64).

These views highlight the different impacts of Christianity across the Pacific region in general, and on Samoa in particular. This chapter will focus on just one of the areas that Christianity dramatically influenced, the cultural status of women, as expressed through gender roles, perceptions within the *faasamoa* and the impact of Christianity on women's participation in politics. The chapter is guided by Trompf's (1987) explanation of Christianity, as embodying the ways of the white settlers to find and win the souls of people whose practices and belief systems were different and in need of change, from the colonisers' point of view (Trompf 1987, p. 25). Such a definition articulates a strong and persuasive view that the missionaries 'dominated' the traditional Samoan culture's beliefs, values and customs. This chapter discusses how Christianity, as an adopted culture, has negatively changed the traditional value that the *faasamoa* placed on women as the *feagaiga*/sister, and argues that Christianity downplayed the status of the Samoan woman as the *feagaiga*/sister and the sacred child, and promoted instead the woman's role as the mother and dutiful wife. The discussion will draw from the stories gathered from the twenty-one study participants and from the researcher's own participant observation of church activities, village gatherings and family commitments.

The pre-Christian period

1. The story of creation: **the position of Samoan women**

Reference has already been made to Samoa's indigenous story of creation as expressed in its oral history of myths and legends. *Tala o le Foafoaga* (The Story of Creation) or *Solo o le Va* (the Chant of Space) tells Samoa's tale of how everything evolved, how society was structured and of the Samoan gods and goddesses (Page 2012). Weimer's (2002) version of the same story not only illustrates that almost all the islands of the Polynesian group share very similar stories but confirmed that Samoa, as a Polynesian island country, had its own gods and goddesses which they worshipped before the arrival of what Trompf (1987) calls 'white Christianity'.

Before Samoa had any outside contacts, they had their own ways of doing things and had put in place systems which mandated roles for their citizens on a day to day basis. As the proverb said *'O Samoa ua uma ona tofi',* 'Samoa is already structured'. The same story highlights where man/*tagata* fits into the Samoan structure. The Samoan story is seen as being very similar to the Christian story of man's creation in the book of Genesis, but different in the sense that, in the Samoan story of creation, both men and women had equal value and entitlements within Samoan society. Vaa (2009) says that *O le tagata,* the human person in Samoan society, is divine, in that every Samoan can trace his or her genealogy back to the High God, *Tagaloalagi*, the Creator of the Heavens and Earth, of the physical universe, of human beings (*tagata*) and of their positions in society (*tofiga*). According to this story, *Tagaloalagi* came down to earth in the form of his progeny (*suli*), through his many marriages with the beautiful daughters of the earth people. Because every Samoan can trace his or her ancestry to *Tagaloalagi* through these marriages, every Samoan is thereby a divine *suli* of *Tagaloalagi*, a word which means 'free in limitless space'. Thus the rights that pertain to this God are also theirs. Most importantly, this belief means that Samoans accord dignity and respect for individual life, regardless of sex without a predilection for either male or female. Both were welcomed and treated equally from a social point of view. In ancient Samoa, there was no custom of infanticide. Why? Because both males and females played valuable roles in society (Vaa 2009, p. 238).

This view is expressed by one of the study participants, a church minister who believes that men and women are equal in Samoa:

> *I believe that men and women in Samoa are equal. The evidence is there, if you look at the responsibilities and lineage of the Samoan woman: the woman will never go to the kitchen, she doesn't until after the missionaries came into our country from England and Europe. They brought with them their culture, a culture where women were oppressed and considered second in ranking or not important. Their mission was to impose this on our faasamoa hence the faasamoa was stirred, it was turned upside down. I believe that the blame, the root of the problem lies with the missionaries when they brought in Christianity. Another illustration of this is the use of the word 'fafine' in the interpretation of the bible. There is no Samoan word as such, but if you have a look in the bible, the interpretation of the word woman is fafine. However the appropriate translation that should be used is the word tamaitai but the missionaries refused to use it, they purposely didn't want to use tamaitai, WHY? Because they didn't want to highlight that Samoan women are just as equal as men.* (Participant 16, Interviewed 22.01.2013).

2. The Samoan woman as *feagaiga* and *tamasa*

In Samoa, women are referred to as sisters, as the *feagaiga* or *tamasa*/sacred child. The concept *feagaiga* is simple to understand and it is used by the brother to refer to his sisters. It denotes every Samoan male's obligation to serve and protect his sisters from birth until death. Latai (2015) employed George Pratt's definition of *feagaiga* as an established relationship between different parties, such as the relationship between brothers and sisters and their children, or the relationship between the chiefs and orators in the Samoan context, or generally as a term meaning an agreement or covenant (Latai, 2015 p.93). The term is also used to signify close ties established between traditional villages, through marriage or lineage, or relations established through a great service rendered. According to Latai (2015), the word *feagaiga* was widely used during the missionary times in Samoa to refer to covenants in the bible such as the covenant between God and Israel, which in his view involved certain promises, taboos and obligations with which both parties must abide. Later on, the missionaries saw the

similarities to these covenants in the relationships between the sister and the brother and between chiefs and orators, and so applied the term covenant to these indigenous relationships. However, Latai (2015) argues that the use of the term 'covenant' in biblical terms is different from the idea of *feagaiga* in a Samoan indigenous sense. According to his analysis and reading of the Bible, the biblical use of the term 'covenant' presents opposite and unequal terms, where God is the powerful agent who dictates the terms of the agreement, and Israel is subject to that agreement (Latai 2015, p. 93). Latai's argument that the use of the term covenant in biblical terms is different from the idea of feagaiga in the Samoan indigenous sense is supported by some of the study participants whom stated that the feagaiga concept is understood by Samoans in Samoa as a true demonstration of a reciprocated equal relationship between the sister and the brother.

This biblical use of the term covenant then denotes a relationship with different or unequal power dimensions. To use Stevens' (2007) conceptualisation of power, the power dynamics illustrated in this covenantal relationship is one of imposing one's will on others, even in the face of opposition. It specifies the probability that one actor within this social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will over the other, despite resistance and regardless of the basis on which this probability rests (Stevens, 2007. p. 19). Consequently, the meaning of the term 'covenant' as explained by Latai (2015) from a biblical context is very different to the corresponding idea of the covenant *feagaiga* in the Samoan context of the brother and sister relationship. The Samoan meaning of covenant does not denote an unequal power relation but rather establishes both parties to the covenant in a relationship of mutual respect and reciprocal values.

In linguistic terms, the word *feagaiga* stems from the root word *feagai,* translated as being responsible or accountable. Being responsible in the Samoan sense with regards to the sister and brother relationship translates as the art of reciprocity between the two parties. In addition, it dictates how Samoan people relate to the sacred spaces between each other, between humanity and nature, and it highlights how people are deeply connected to their taboo beliefs/*tapu,* and to *faaaloalo*/mutual respect (Latai, 2015 p.93). The term *feagaiga* gives special honour and a prestigious status to the sister from the brother and it involves a reciprocal tribute to the brother. The principles of such covenantal relationships require both parties to be obliged to one another. The male

siblings, the brothers, are taught to show respect to their sisters. This respect is symbolised in various actions from the brother. For instance, he is not allowed to touch the sister's personal belongings or to go near the sister's bedroom. The brother is also forbidden from making any indecent conversation in the sister's presence. One of the study participants supports this view on how crucial the brother's actions are around the sister:

> *.......In the brother and sister relationship it would be very disrespectful of me to refer or address my sister as fafine/woman because in the Samoan context fafine/woman has negative connotations. I have to address her as my feagaiga, o lou tuafafine/my sister or my covenant* (Participant 12, Interviewed 19.01.2013).

In the previous chapter, reference is made to the brother's obligation to serve the sister to the best of his ability. The Samoan sayings *o le ioimata o le tama tane lona tuafafine*, 'the sister is the pupil of the brother's eye', and *E mu mata o le tama tane I lona tuafafine*, 'the brother's face burns for his sister', provide evidence for the brother's obligation. The brother has to make sure that the sister is fully satisfied with his service because of the belief that the sister, as the sacred child, has the power to curse him if she is not pleased.

Latai in his discussion of the *feagaiga* concept made a significant point that before Christianity there was no evidence of women holding chiefly titles except for Salamasina (Latai, 2015.p.95). Such practice is evidence of the prestigious and respectable relation between the sister and brother covenantal relationship in Samoa. Some of the study participants supported this argument by stating,

> *.....The relationship between the sister and the brother is very important and was well respected by both parties. The sister knows her space, responsibilities, obligation etc, it is likewise for the brother. It is a mutual relationship founded on respect for one another, if the sister wanted to become chief and take over the responsibilities pertaining to the brother, then she will have to forgo her honorific title as feagaiga and take over the chiefly responsibilities. She will then no longer be the princess, but the warrior of the family, (*Participant 6, Interviewed 21.01.2013)

…. I don't know of any woman who became chief in the history of Samoa except for the Tafaifa. This was because the sisters were well and highly respected before Christianity. The sister was the sacred children and was not to be touched by anyone. She had so many powers…….(Participant 19, Interviewed 25.01.2013)

The *feagaiga's* respected status however comes with serious responsibilities. She is called the *'pae ma le auli'*/shell and iron, symbolising her role as the peacemaker. Her role is to model peace within the family and she resolves any frictions within her family. In times where the brother is in strife, she steps in, even to the extent where she offers her life to save the brother. She is the *faioa/*producer, the maker of cultural wealth and valuables such as fine-mats/*ietoga,* tapa/*siapo* and sleeping mats/*falamoe.* These cultural items are essential not only as ceremonial gifts but also for their crucial meaning in some of the ceremonial actions imposed by custom. For instance, in the *ifoga/*act of apology, the 'fine-mat' is used to cover the culprit. It symbolises the act of protecting the culprit from harm and, in doing so, the culprit is forgiven. To add to these responsibilities, the sister's role as *tausala* has two meanings in different scenarios. One meaning refers to the sister's role as the redeemer, the price or payment for a family's indecent or unlawful act, whilst the other meaning denotes her dignity and the way that the *feagaiga* carries the honour of her family. It is in this role that she has to maintain her purity and virginity; otherwise she will bring shame upon the whole family. The sister, in her role as *tausala,* is also given the honour of concluding all ceremonial activities. In the previous chapter, I have made reference to Fairbairn-Dunlop's (1996) argument, where she sees the sacred valuation of the Samoan women as *feagaiga* as giving them prestige, power and influence in the family and community. In this sense, the sister receives respect and treatment equal to that of the family chief. During important decision making, on matters relating to the family, her opinion is highly regarded, to the extent that she has the final power to reverse or reject a family's unanimous decision.

The discussion on the Samoan woman as *feagaiga* and sacred child suggests that before Christianity the Samoan woman as the sister held not only a prestigious status as a very powerful figure within society but was also held responsible for her brother. Moreover, her status demonstrates that the brother and sister covenantal relationship was unique in

maintaining order and peace within the Samoan society. Although this covenantal relationship still exists today, the majority of the study participants believed that it has been much changed by colonisation and Christianity. One of the participants reflected on this dramatic transformation:

> *In the faasamoa, we refer to our sisters as our feagaiga, they are the pupil of the brother's eye. We serve them no matter what. However ever since Christianity was introduced to our shores, things have changed. We, the church ministers, have taken over the prestige and the sacredness our sisters had traditionally (*Participant 16, Interviewed 22.01.2013).

Another participant made a similar observation, that the woman's status in the *faasamoa* was unquestionable before Christianity, and that Samoan women, as the sisters, held a position of prestige within society. As the sacred child, it was taboo for the sister to do any heavy tasks. She had the *mana*/power to curse the brothers if they didn't do justice to their obligations in the *feagaiga* relationship. However, this participant also felt that this *mana*/power, this prestigious status is not the same anymore. In her opinion, the covenantal relationship still exists today but the honour and the privileges the sister as the *feagaiga* used to have in the past are no longer there. According to this participant, from what she has learned, all the traditional privileges the sister used to possess have now been transferred to the current representatives of this Christian God that Samoa has accepted and embraced.

> *If you refer to my answers to the previous questions you will see that I have always and will always support the view that the status of women within the traditional structure of the Samoan society is unquestionable. From my experience as a woman this status existed in the past and it still exists today. This is what makes me proud to be a Samoan woman. As the sister or feagaiga, we hold the most prestigious position in the faasamoa. I am the queen and the princess in my family, I get all the service that I want. Before Christianity we had the examples of great woman warriors Nafanua and Salamasina where they held all the four most prestigious paramount chiefly titles in the whole of Samoa. They were warriors, they fought wars for the country and won them. What does that mean? As the sacred child, not only did we hold the prestigious status*

within society but we had power. However the privileges that we had as the feagaiga was taken from us and bestowed upon the church ministers who are physical figures of the Christian God that Samoa has accepted to be the head of its society. This symbolises not only how much respect our forefathers had for this new God, but also symbolises how committed Samoa is to changing from what was believed to be unacceptable to suitable and appropriate behaviours in line with Christian teachings and principles (Participant 20, Interviewed 21.01.2013).

The interview responses from this participant and from the majority of the participants of this study support the argument of this thesis that in measuring inequality in developing countries like Samoa, there is the need to fully understand the cultural status of women across historical periods. Moreover, the participant cited above clearly indicates that even though Samoa did well in upholding its indigenous customs and traditions, elements such as the concept of *feagaiga* were transformed by colonisation and Christianity. Most interestingly, her opinion at the end of the section quoted supports Trompf's (1987) argument, discussed earlier, that the missionaries came to countries like Samoa with the aim of imposing their culture, practices and belief systems, which they knew were righteous and the only ones that should prevail. Deeply held indigenous cultural values and beliefs such as the *faasamoa* were wrong and had to change.

The Christian period

1. The new *feagaiga*

The missionaries who first brought Christianity to the Samoan islands were from the London Missionary Society (LMS) which arrived in Samoa in the 1830s led by Britishers whom were mostly Congregationalists. It was then followed by the Roman Catholic missionaries whom were predominantly French and Marist in 1945 and came from Wallis and Futuna. The Methodist Church missionaries arrived in 1835 with the Seventh Day Adventist and Mormon missionaries' later (Garrett, 1992 .pp 188 - 208). The fact that it was not just one Christian denomination with various historical backgrounds implies different teaching on the word of God, different believes. According to Gilson (1970) it was no doubt that these denominations also had various

agendas and most of all different perceptions on gender in Samoa. Gilson also saw that the central events in most versions of the acceptance of Christianity in Samoa are the arrival of the missionary John Williams and his encounters with the matai Malietoa Vainu'upo in 1830 and 1832. Christianity was already present in Samoa in 1830, and Williams and Malietoa, although important and intriguing figures played relatively modest parts in the establishment of the new religion.

Samoa was the first island in the South Pacific to be fully converted to and to accept Christianity. Robson (2009) suggests that Christianity received such a warm and ready welcome because in the first place Samoans had had prior encounters with Europeans, and second because Samoa had a convenient legend, as discussed earlier, so they felt that they already knew of Christianity (p. 22). Samoa's oral history tells our forefathers' reaction when they first saw the missionaries. Because the missionaries were so tall and white and dressed in long white attire, our forefathers believed that they were fallen angels. They were thought to have come the sky (burst/*ua pa le lagi)* and they were named 'the white missionaries' or *papalagi* (people from the sky) (Page 2012). The story goes that the forefathers treated their traditional culture as something human that could be easily done away with, but accepted Christianity as something from the God of the sky and so not to be questioned. They were also encouraged to move away from Samoa's traditional way of life towards Christianity, the white people's way, on the assumption that success, better standards of living, development and other long term benefits would follow. Some of the traditional rituals and way of life that were most significantly changed and no longer practiced were the traditional ceremonies in which women participated, especially the rituals that had value and meaning to their status as the *feagaiga* or the sister.

One of the interviews gives examples of traditional rituals that are no longer practiced by women today and explains how this then diminishes the value of their status as the *feagaiga*:

> *I'm of the belief that Christianity had impacted our cultural beliefs and values. And I'm sure you would agree with me that it has both positive and negative sides to it. With regards to the status of women as the feagaiga, as soon as Christianity arrived in Samoa, women were not allowed to have more than one*

marriage. In the view of Christianity, this was against the values of purity and cleanliness. From the view of the faasamoa, more than one marriage for the feagaiga was part of her responsibilities to extend kinship ties and to claim prestigious chiefly titles for the family lineage. There was a process called faamaseiauga in the faasamoa where a woman's virginity was tested by an orator as part of the marriage ceremony. This was banned during Christianity because of the view that this was adultery. But if the woman was proved to be a virgin then it proclaimed that she had honoured her family's honour for her as the sacred child and increased her family's status (Participant 12, Interviewed 16.01.2013).

The missionaries' efforts in evangelising the Samoan islands saw the introduction of a new figure in the form of the pastor. With the introduction of Christianity, the pastor was seen as equivalent to the traditional priest, acting as the mediator or the intermediary between God and the people. According to Tagaloa (1997) because Samoa had so much respect for Christianity, Malietoa Vainuupo, the paramount chief who received the first missionaries in 1830, proclaimed that all the honour and dignity that had been given to the traditional chiefs would now be directed to the Christian God. In fulfilling this proclamation, Malietoa bestowed the title of *faafeagaiga*, 'to be the covenant', upon the pastors. They were incorporated into what Latai (2015) referred to as 'the quasi sisters' of every Samoan village. The covenantal relationship between the village and the pastor was no different to that of the sister and brother relationship. Like the *feagaiga* in the sister and brother relationship, the pastor was recognised to hold divine power. His word was honoured and as the image of God within the village he was feared by all the villagers.

As a result of this change, the village plays the role of the brother to serve the pastor as the *feagaiga* to the best of their ability. The villages build houses, provide vehicles, food and a fortnightly salary for the pastor's other necessities. In return the pastor must maintain his dignity and honour, and intercede on behalf of the village. The pastor has also taken over the role of redeemer and peacemaker in times of feuds and conflicts within the village.

The transposition of the attributes of the *feagaiga* onto the pastors, meant that they could co-opt the sister's roles within the family and the community. The principles of the newly formed covenant suggest that it not only protected the power of the village council but also led to the demise of the sister's sacred power. The interplay of sacredness which covered the brother and sister relationship has been shifted to the relationship between the pastor and the village. This raises the question of how this then impacted on the Samoan women's status as the sacred child and what did these changes mean for women's participation in decision making in the future? Learning from the study participants it is obvious that the conversion to Christianity has changed Samoan women's outlook on their roles and responsibilities. There is more detail on this later on in this chapter.

2. Transformation of the *feagaiga* concept

The impact of Christianity on the status of Samoan women has been previously analysed by scholars like Gunson (1987), Fairbairn-Dunlop (1996), and Schoeffel (1975).They all seem to share the view that the conversion to Christianity had far reaching consequences on the status of Samoan women, which now concentrates more on motherhood and becoming a good wife. Gunson (1978) illustrate this by stating,

> Missionary wives set the appropriate example to the female converts of dutiful, modest womanhood which they should now espouse. Schools established by the mission…taught sewing, an essential skill if everyone was to be decently clothed, cooking, traditionally a male responsibility, flower gardening and other genteel occupations (Gunson, 1978 . p 62).

> You should act thus. Let the wife remain at home and put the house in order, and the husband go out and cultivate the land, day by day…Let the daughters remain at home with their mothers, and learn to sew, wash, iron, to make mats and hats….. (Gunson, 1978. p.63).

Moreover, they believed that the missionaries had a negative view of Samoan women's involvement in traditional ceremonial activities which were seen to be associated with sexuality, of the example cited above from the interviews. In the view of the missionaries, these practices were undignified and against Christian beliefs and morals.

They therefore abolished these rituals and promoted instead the idea of purity before marriage, thinking that it would uplift the status of Samoan women. Significantly, in the view of the majority of the study participants, the missionaries failed to recognise that Samoan women's involvement in these traditional practices gave them much power and influence. They also failed to recognise that the *feagaiga*/sister's participation in these practices was vital in transmitting rank and extending the political alliances of villages and their high chiefs. In their detailed interviews, the study participants suggest that according to the belief systems that the missionaries held at the time, they may have been right, but the abolition of these ceremonial roles has weakened the power attributed to the sister as the *feagaiga* and vested it instead in the village pastor. This perspective is strongly evident in one participant's words:

> *The conversion to Christianity to my view had negative impacts, and these impacts have shown how dominating the missionaries were. I am sure they were of the view that their beliefs were better.....they never wanted to acknowledge any cultural meaning in women's participation in some of these traditional ceremonies. Why? Because their aim was to impose their culture on others. As simple as that...* (Participant 11, Interviewed 15.01.2013).

Another made the following observation:

> *Yes, they might be right in abolishing Samoan women from taking part in these occasions but this begs the question of who are they to tell us what we should and should not do? They failed to acknowledge any other side of the scenario because they purely wanted all the privileges. It was part of their mission and if there was a time where they had second thoughts about encouraging Samoan women's participation in the above mentioned events it would mean failure for them and their mission.* (Participant 9, Interviewed 11.01.2013)

According to another participant, the positive impacts of Christianity should be acknowledged but the impact on the status of women was negative.

> *We have to applaud the fact that Christianity has also had positive impacts on the Samoan society. However for the status of the sister as the feagaiga, the*

conversion to Christianity made the Christian figure in society known as the church minister take over all the privileges the faasamoa initially had given our women as the feagaiga/sisters (Participant 13, Interviewed 17.01.2013).

To elaborate more on the comments by the study participants, during my participant observation, I also had the chance to observe some of the activities in my father's village. In the village's December meeting there was a decision to banish one of the families for not abiding by the village rules. The family was asked to provide a huge fine with the condition that if by 4pm that day the family hadn't provided the entire fine then they were to be banished. The family couldn't afford the fine so they asked the church minister if he could intervene for their lives. The family carried out what is known in the *faasamoa* as the *ifoga*/apology process, where the church minister was covered with the fine-mat. This role is usually performed by the *feagaiga*/sister in her role as the *tausala.* But in this case the pastor was involved rather than the sister. This example corroborates the points made in this chapter and in the study participants' responses, that the concept of the *feagaiga* has been transformed. Now in times of tension the pastor takes the role that the *feagaiga*/sister traditionally played before Christianity.

Figure 5

Gunson (1987), Fairbairn-Dunlop (1996) and Schoeffel (1975) also argue that Christianity brought with it the European models of gender, based on Victorian ideals which promoted the roles of women as maternal and domestic, and imposed these on

Samoa. In their views, these ideals were portrayed by the missionaries' wives, and later by the pastors' wives who served as the perfect role models of the ideal woman with the intention of transmitting a way of life to their local counterparts. The missionaries' and the pastors' homes became the classroom for the Samoan women to learn their domestic duties, how to be the rightful, proper Christian mothers and wives. Overall, these scholars clearly highlight how influential Christianity was and still is in changing the status of Samoan women. Again, from one of the study participants:

> *Christianity succeeded in its work. This is evident in,…if you have a look at how the bible was translated the word 'tamaitai' was not used at all. The missionaries used the word 'fafine' all throughout the bible. Why? Because they didn't want the word tamaitai to be kept because to the Samoans the use of the word tamaitai associates not only with the female's responsibilities within the family and society but also promotes the status of the sister as feagaiga. To the missionaries the word fafine in the Hebrew language indicates negativity or demeans the value of women. It implies exactly what was happening in the lives of women in Europe at the time and connotes the position of women in marriage.* (Participant 12, Interviewed 19.01.2013).

In addition to teaching the Samoan women about domestic duties, the missionaries also established women's fellowships which are now known as *Mafutaga a Tina*. Again, these fellowships took over and superseded the power of the traditional organisation known as the *aualuma* that had previously comprised the village daughters. The change of focus in the roles and responsibilities of women, where the emphasis was on women carrying out domestic duties, being the good mother, and the housewife serving the family, replaced that of serving in the *feagaiga* role. Note the comments from another of the study participants who identifies this transformation and the way women moved from being the honourable *feagaiga*/sister to performing domestic duties:

> *..if you look at the duties of an ideal Samoan woman, no woman was to cook in the olden days. They were the sacred child who was to remain in the house whilst the brother serves and provides for her. As soon as the missionaries came, this was changed. Her value as the feagaiga got degraded. The missionaries imposed on our society the women's position in Europe, where they*

came from and women were to cook, wash and not to interfere with decision making in the family.... (Participant 15, Interviewed 22.01.2013).

The introduction of the women's fellowship also saw the pastor's wife in a leadership position and, with the emphasis on the domestic duties of the mother, the women who are married into the villages or the chiefs' and orators' wives took on more of the leadership roles that in the past were largely the domain of the chiefs' sisters or the daughters of the village.

These changes not only support Trompf's (1987) designation of Christianity as the most effective tool of colonisation (p. 24), but clearly highlight that the transposition of the concept of *feagaiga* away from the sister to the pastor himself, enormously diminished the status of the Samoan woman, not only as the *feagaiga* but also as the sacred child. These changes have downgraded Samoan women's honour and dignity as the *feagaiga*/sister, in favour of their roles as mothers and wives. This teaching has gone so far as to change the way that women perceive themselves.

One of the study participants reflected very thoughtfully on this:

Christianity played a crucial role in our lives. It categorised the do's and the don't's especially for us women and we grew up with it. Somewhere along the line I thought that this is how life is, that my position is in the home, that I am always second, that during ceremonial activities I always have to cook, clean and eat last. At times I kept telling myself that Christianity brainwashed who we truly are and where we should be in society. So in all the decisions we were conditioned to think that men were always superior to us, and that women should always come last. Why? Because it is what we learnt about every Sunday right from childhood (Participant 4, Interviewed 04.01.2013).

The above discussion with reference to the quotations from the field highlight the fact that the views on the past and likewise for any issue will differ, something that is very difficult to determine if true or not because the original idea and thinking should be respected and treated in a manner that will not cause any offense. Such is very much in line with Jolly and Macintyre (1989) suggestion in their book 'Family and Gender in the

Pacific: Domestic Contradictions and the Colonial impact' where they stated that "we offer a defence not on the basis of who we are but on the basis of the scholarship itself….of use not only for its unravelling of processes in the remote past but also because these bear on very current debates about the family and gender throughout the Pacific (Jolly and Macintyre, 1989, p.18). There is the need to acknowledge that there is always questions raised on the integrity of quotations used however as indicated above in the research on gender equality in Samoa there is the need to acknowledge the perspectives of people in the field with the understanding that it is not to defend any position but to acknowledge that this is the reality of such issue in the countries like the researched.

Christianity and what it means for women's decision making today

In Samoa today, women are the backbone of the church. According to the majority of the study participants, they are the main fundraisers, the implementers and the main providers for church activities. They contribute to the development of the church through their participation in different sections of the church. But in terms of women taking leadership roles such as becoming ordained Ministers, they continue to be disadvantaged. As one of the study participants said:

> *I believe that women are the backbone of the church, without them the church would be nothing. I believe that it is through their great contribution that Christianity grows within Samoa. However, when it comes to decision making positions within the church, women are not allowed. If you look at the church structure, women are allowed to be deacons of the church however they can't become lay preachers nor be ordained ministers. And I strongly believe that it's because of men's attitude towards women in leadership position* (Participant 16, Interviewed 24.01.2013).

There is the common argument that culture and Christianity are two different entities, and the one does not interfere with the other's politics or administration. One of the study participants explained that this separation is evident in the pastor's separation from village politics. According to this participant, even though all the cultural dignity and honour was bestowed upon the pastor as the village's *feagaiga,* there was mutual

agreement that the pastor will look after the spiritual welfare and intercede for the village, but that he is not allowed to sit in village council meetings. The pastor is only allowed in the house of the council upon invitation. In return, the village council doesn't interfere with matters pertaining to the church (Participant 19, Interviewed 04.02.2013). Nevertheless, the literature on women's status and value in Samoa, as well as the interviews conducted for this study, give ample evidence that Christianity, despite these restrictions on the pastor's role, has had drastic influences on the majority of Samoa's cultural beliefs, customs and traditions.

The transposition of the indigenous concept of *feagaiga* to the pastor shad the consequence of degrading the power and the sacred status of the sister and promoting instead the maternal and domestic roles. This dramatically changed the perceptions of women towards their role in society and lowered their status. As one of the study participants observed:

> *Samoa is a very religious country. They took on Christianity very seriously and Christianity itself was very influential. The missionaries were very clever, they knew Samoa's capabilities and they literally targeted all aspects of life. Why? Because they wanted their mission to succeed which it did. They knew that if they were to succeed with their mission they would have to educate people, which they did. Most of the life skills I learned from the Aoga Faifeau/Pastors School where I learnt nothing about the faasamoa, but rather life skills such as sewing, weaving, cooking and spirituality. Therefore I grew up learning about how to become a perfect woman in the kitchen. I was never taught how to become a politician until way too late in life. So if anything I would blame the missionaries and their mission...*(Participant 15, Interviewed 22.01.2013).

By contrast, ten of the study participants argued that Christianity should not be blamed for diminishing the status of women in Samoa but rather the missionaries themselves who brought Christianity to the Samoan shores. These participants believed that the missionaries had other agendas than simply Christianising the Samoan islands. Evangelisation was based on their personal interpretation of the Bible and their backgrounds were a factor influencing most of their teachings.

It is all to do with the interpretation of what they say it is, but it's really practices which doesn't have any biblical basis. The doctrine of the bible is and should be the only guiding document for Christianity. However its translation and interpretation has been ruined by the opinion of the translator. You can tell it by comparing the English version with the Samoan one. Not only that you will not find a specific verse which says that women should come second. You would only find stories about the high status of women, for instance that they were the first missionaries. (Participant 6, Interviewed 05.01.2013).

Another participant agreed with this in their interview by stating that most people misunderstood and misinterpreted the gospel:

In the case of Christianity I wonder if the male dominance came about because of what the bible says. So some men take to the extreme the position of men as the leader and the woman as the helper...their roles, their responsibilities are also different. But the bible doesn't demean, I mean doesn't let one be more valuable than the other rather the bible sees that they complement each other, one needs the other and that is why the roles are different...From the Christian perspective if the man knows his role and the women knows her role then they will complement each other and become one, because they are one... (Participant 12, Interviewed 19.01.2013)

As is the case for any other social and cultural issue that is contested, there are always multiple interpretations of the advantages and the disadvantages that existed prior to European contact, but it is clear that matrilineal political and economic structures were present in tribal societies in many parts of the region. They privileged women's land rights, women's rights in decision-making and their role in economic exchange (Macintyre 2012). Yet these structures were generally undermined as colonial governments created legal systems that replicated the patriarchal, hierarchical and hereditary structures of their own societies (Huffer 2006). What is striking about the interviews conducted for this study is the fact that even 186 years after the London Missionary Society arrived in Samoa, women and men in key decision-making roles in Samoa still know and discuss the changes in the status of women since that time. While all the participants, who include some ministers, were very respectful of the church and

their Christian faith, there was an overwhelming view that women had lost their key public roles through the advent of colonisation. Drawing on the different interview perspectives discussed above, it is evident that Christianity was not the only tool of colonisation in the history of countries like Samoa. Nevertheless, it is generally agreed to have been one of the most effective and active tools, with far reaching consequences for women. As the interviews show, Christianity is considered to be partly responsible for Samoan women's poor political representation because it degraded the value of the woman as the *feagaiga*/sister in the public domain while encouraging the maternal and domestic roles in the private sphere. This had a drastic influence on not only Samoan society itself but also on Samoan women and on their position in society.

CHAPTER 5

'SAMA SE MAGO, FILII LE TAI SE AGAVAA'[4]
WOMEN AND POLITICS IN SAMOA.

……men's political behaviour is viewed as the norm and women have been

stereotyped as passive, apolitical and conservative (Waylen,S.1996 p. 10)

The last two chapters examined two cultural traditions which affect women in Samoa. The first one is an indigenous tradition which situates and details the status and the value of the Samoan woman and the second an imported tradition which has impacted the indigenous status and value of a Samoan woman. This chapter looks at the implications from these two traditions for women's political participation today. This is done through investigating the different processes a Samoan *tamaitai* undertakes as a pathway to getting into politics and how the two traditions discussed previously influence both women themselves and the wider community's perception of women's political representation.

According to Meredith (2013), in the Pacific region, the impediments to more women participating in the Pacific parliaments are not simply a matter of women's education and achievement within the public sector but historical and cultural barriers, economic development and barriers in the electoral systems. While this chapter examines electoral processes in Samoa in relation to women's representation, it also argues that cultural norms and values need to be better understood, and that, in the case of Samoa, they are not, of necessity, barriers to women's participation in politics. Indeed, the cultural values discussed in the interviews conducted for this study could be employed as building blocks to increase women's political participation.

In her important study of parts of the Melanesian South Pacific islands, Wallace (2011) concludes that politics and decision making on matters of importance are commonly considered to be 'men's business'(p. 505). Building on Wallace's work, this chapter examines whether this is also the case in Samoa, a Polynesian Pacific island. It will also

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[4] Translated as the process of selecting the most appropriate person or best candidate for a chiefly title or politics.

examine whether Afshar's (1996) claim, that men's political behaviour is viewed as the norm and that women have been stereotyped as passive, apolitical and conservative, applies in the context of Samoan culture. Afshar sees this stereotyping as not being specific to any region or country but rather a perspective that is shared worldwide, and to be challenged by feminists (p. 10). Some of the study data collected from interviews conducted with women and men, particularly those in positions of political power, contributes to the Samoan perspective. For instance a female interviewee states:

> *Politics from outside it's a dirty game. Males will go out in terms of politics to persuade candidates, and it's almost like prostituting yourself. Now for a woman to do that from the inside there is no… it's hard to divide. I think some women don't want to go and beg. If someone begged you to come and vote for him/her it's quite different from persuading the chiefs to vote for you.* (Participant14, Interviewed 13.01.2013)

Another interviewee spoke about the amount of work women have to do in order to get into politics:

> *We women have to prove ourselves, we are the ones that have to prove ourselves, that we can do just as well, not to compete, and that is always have been my message, I have always kept saying I don't want to be better than men. It's not my interest. I just want men to value women and to see how they can contribute and make the world a better place.*(Participant 2, Interviewed 02.01.2013).

This chapter discusses how traditional processes, whether in the family or the *faamatai*, have been influenced by different perceptions and understandings of what the *faasamoa*/culture is with regards to the equality of men and women. As I have argued, Christianity, as well men's decisions to pursue their own interests, have impacted on women's full ability to participate equally in all sectors of society. These factors have impacted on women themselves and shaped their own expectations. The title of the chapter, *'Sema se mago, filii le tai se agavaa',* 'selecting the most appropriate person or best candidate for a chiefly title or politics', frames the discussion that follows.

Background

Women's political participation has been a significant challenge for the Pacific island countries for many years. The statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2016) show that the region's average for women parliamentarians is 16.0%, well below the world average of 21.8% in 2013. Samoa is home to a total population of 187,820 of which 48% are women (Bureau of Statistics 2012).

Women are the main pillars in the development of all aspects of Samoan society. They are the main supporters and fundraisers of the church. They hold many high positions within the government, non-government organisations (NGOs) as well as the private sector. However, statistics show that they are still well below the numbers of their male counterparts in decision-making positions, whether in parliament, public and private sector, government board or decision making at the community or village level. An illustration of this: in the 54 Government Ministries, Government Corporations and Constitutional Authorities, since 2015 only 17 women as compared to 31 men have been appointed a Chief Executive Officer or General Manager. The members of public boards are 19% female and 81% male. In politics, of the 50 seats of Parliament, only five are women. Of the thirteen members of cabinet, only two are women. Most villages have women's committees who play a major practical role in village development but, importantly, they are not in a decision-making role (Apelu 2011).

For any Samoan to be eligible to run for politics, the individual must have a registered chiefly title. Chiefly titles are inherited and both male and female family heirs are entitled to be considered for a chiefly title/*suafa matai*. Receiving a chiefly title is based on being an heir of a family and also on the amount of service an individual renders. This services comes through contributing to family affairs through title bestowals, funerals, contributions towards improving the village or church, and in many other ways. According to the 2011 census, only 9% (16,787) of the total Samoan population are chiefs (*matais*). So only a small proportion of the total population is involved in village councils and especially decision making at the village level, where *matai* are involved. Of the total number of *matai,* 89% are male and 11% (1,846) are female. The small proportion of women implies that Samoan families still gave preference to men to

be *matai* and to be the family representative in decision-making processes (SBS Statistics 2012).

As already mentioned, the criterion for any Samoan to run for politics is that the candidate have a registered chiefly title. The title indicates to the electoral commission and authorities the village and district from which a person is running. For a Samoan to obtain a chiefly title, one has to go through a process at family level and then there is an expectation that that person will serve in the local level politics of *faamatai,* where his or her leadership attributes will be put into practice. The following sections will examine the processes taken at each level, the family level and in the village council system known as the *faamatai*/chiefly system, and they will discuss the implications of these processes. There will also be discussion of the key roles that the family and the village council play in promoting or constraining women's full participation in decision making. Previous chapters clearly articulated women's rights to access chiefly titles, while this chapter argues that the standard practice of selecting male siblings as family chiefs influences family thinking and perception towards attaining and granting chiefly titles. In addition as previously discussed, some foreign traditions, specifically Christianity, have greatly influenced Samoan society's thinking around women's role and status, and especially around women participating in decision making.

Aiga **(Family) Process**

Samoa has a very distinctive hierarchical society and various cultural traditions have remained strong through periods of great social change and social development. The Samoan way of life, the *faasamoa,* represents the ethos of Samoan culture and society and regulates social practices, institutions and systems (Ministry of Women 2014). The extended family system or *aigapotopoto* is the fundamental social unit within Samoa. It provides the social structure from which Samoa's collective cultural way of life is both constructed and enacted.

As one of the study participants explained, every Samoan is born into a family. He or she is given a name which identifies the family, the land and the chiefly title to which the person belongs. Every Samoan is known in their *aiga*/family as a *suli*/heir and it is the understanding of the Samoans that each *suli* is born into the world with inherited

rights and status. Some of these inherited rights include equal access to land and a chiefly title, and these do not depend on gender or age. Each *suli* knows their place and their assigned responsibilities for ensuring the family's welfare.

> *Traditionally we are born knowing our roles and responsibilities, let alone knowing our place within our family and society. Each individual is born into a family and that family has a chiefly title and land, and that identifies who you are as a Samoan. Whether you are man or woman you belong to that family, you are an heir of a particular chiefly title and as an heir of that particular family, you belong and own specific land. So when people ask the question 'Who you are?' by that they mean, 'To which family title and to which land do you belong?' Samoans identify themselves by the chiefly title of the family they come from and the land they belong to.* (Participant 16, Interviewed 25.01.2013)

The values of *faaaloalo*/respect, *va/*relational space between people, *vafealoai/*respectful space, *vafesootai/*connecting space, *vafetufaai*/sharing space, *vatapuia*/sacred space and *vafefaasoaai*/consultative space are the core components entrenched and instilled in each family member. These components constitute the basis on which people operate their daily routine. All matters relating to the welfare of the family are to be discussed and to be agreed upon by all the family members. From one of the study participants:

> *Everything starts in the family. The matters relating to family affairs in my belief is politics and I also believe that we have our own unique way of dealing with it. With all the family politics all the family members count because we come into the discussion as suli (heirs). And I strongly believe, based on my experience and how things are dealt within my family, the opinion of all the suli matters and there will not be a final decision on any matter if all the members don't agree* (Participant 18, Interviewed 28.01.2013).

The same participant went on to explain that a Samoan individual is not only born into a family with rights, and knows his or her place, but has to serve the family with integrity, no matter what, and with the understanding that such a service will be rewarded later on

in life. According to the participant, this service is looked into when appointment of a family title-holder is being deliberated.

From here the discussion focuses on the family structure in general and the process of selecting a family chief. It will then move on to discussing gender inequalities within these processes. One of the study participants described his experience of the entire process of a chiefly title bestowal (Observation December 27th in *Fasitoo-tai*, Samoa). According to this participant, chiefly title bestowal is a lengthy process and one which needed the consent of the entire family, no matter whether they were living in the country or abroad. The participant stated that the Samoan proverb of '*Sema se mago, filii le tai se agavaa'* (translated as 'selecting an ideal, most appropriate and suitable person') symbolises the thorough and genuinely democratic process for selecting a chiefly title holder for any Samoan *aigapotopoto* (extended family). The selection process within the family usually takes longer than a week or may take years depending on each different family. A *saofai* (title bestowal ceremony) will not take place if the *soalaupulega* does not reach any conclusion.

> *In the faasamoa the concept of SOALAUPULE (consensus) is the core aspect of any decision making process, whether big or small. All the family heirs need to agree or come to a common ground. I believe that the soalaupega is one symbolic process that tells of the richness of the faasamoa and how things were beautifully done in the past. Don't take me wrong, this process is still practiced but it's not the same as say 50 years ago. It symbolises that the Samoans value all the people around them, that the spatial relationship between one human being and the other is ideal. Not only that but it dignifies and acknowledges each member's existence and their contribution to the family welfare, and whatever the decision is at the end of the soalaupulega that decision will have the bonus of the acknowledgement and the value, but it symbolises a long time commitment from the entire family and an indication that you have all the respect you deserve and that the family will be behind you in anything you do.*
> (Participant 7, Interviewed 23.01.2013)

For the family members to consider someone for the family chief, during the lengthy discussion, the *soalaupulega*, the main aspect that is taken into consideration is a

person's service, hence the Samoan proverb '*O le alai le pule o le tautua',* 'the pathway to leadership is through service'. Another participant (Participant 13, Interviewed 05.02.2013) explained that one earns one's right to be the family *matai* through service, and the service is traced back from childhood to the date of decision. For instance, families will look at whether you have served the *aiga*/family well through all the family commitments such as funerals, weddings, church contributions, and whether you have provided for the family on a day to day basis. In addition, family discussion will look at whether the nominee has a plantation, a farm, whether he or she can fish, if the person has people skills and whether one excels in the oratory language or knows the principles of the *faasamoa*. If all of these criteria are fulfilled and if all the family members agree then the next process will begin. This same participant stated that this particular process is very crucial in every sense because if all the *suli* decide on a person to take the family title and if later on this chief wants to run for politics, he or she will have no doubt that the support of the family is behind them. In the past the person most favoured to receive the title was usually someone who lived in the village from which the title hailed.

However, as one of the study participants stated, as time goes by the process for selecting a family chief has changed in many ways. Family tradition has changed and this influences how families carry out these processes. This participant noted that major relationships within the family are not the same as 100 years or even 40 years ago. Usually a person who lived in the village, known in Samoan as a *taumalae*, someone who was born and grown up in the village from which the title originates, would always be considered in the discussion. He indicated that was not just protocol but a sign from family members from near and far, the *aitaumalele,* that they acknowledge the service of the people who have lived in the land of origin. It was also the *aitaumalele*'s way of respecting the *taumalae* family member's wealth of knowledge about village politics and how things operate in a specific village.

This participant referred to wealth and better education as some of the newer factors influencing family processes and preferences. Less and less emphasis is being placed on those living in the village of origin and looking after the family. Family systems and structures are now in a state of flux and these trends are having a significant impact on gender relationships within the family systems and structures.

If you look at families today, money and good education has taken over the suli's service. Family members have chosen those who graduate with higher degrees from overseas or someone who lives in New Zealand or America because they think that if they are given the title they will send money to fulfil the family commitments. The impact is that family voice will never be heard during the council of chief's deliberations. Not only that, but there will be endless family court cases over titles and family land. Money has influenced the family system and relationships today. The evidence of this is that almost all the Samoan families have three to four sons (paramount chiefs).Why? Because the soalaupulega process is not done how we did it in the past. Another aspect that is contributing to these changes is the person who is holding the title from time to time. If the family gets the right person then everything will be smooth but if we get the wrong person, someone that would put his or her ego before the family then you know, there will be no peace, family members will be against each other and will be suffering. (Participant 9, Interviewed 30.01.2012)

The extended family is headed by a *matai*/chief who is either a female or male and is appointed by consensus by all the members of the family. According to Lawson (1996), the individual who holds the title will carry no particular status or rank by virtue of descent. Rank and status belong to the title, rather than to the person holding it. The title is a symbol of the person's utmost respect within the family and the family's high regard in appointing him or her to hold the family title. However a lot has changed in these relationships as compared to 100 years ago. Personal ego has intervened and caused a lot of changes in the system today. And despite the fact that Samoans believe that a woman has equal opportunity to get a chiefly title, the statistics show that only 11% of the chiefs are women. This is a clear sign that Samoan families still give preference to men to be *matai* and to be the family representative in decision making processes.

One of the study participants highlighted this inequality:

….as I said before what do we really mean by 'equal'? What is the Samoan translation for equal? Is it 'avanoa tutusa'? Even if we translate it into avanoa

tutusa/equal opportunity it's not the same. Women don't have the same opportunities as men do. (Participant 3, Interviewed 02.01.2013)

This participant alluded to the fact that there are fewer women *matai,* as the classic example of such inequality. She went on to say that the reasons families generally favour men, is because they perceive men as being more able to provide for the family. According to this participant, Samoan families during the appointment process choose those who can enhance the status of the family, enhance their economic, financial, and food security, and ensure that the well-being of the whole family is looked after. In this sense, Samoan families predominantly choose men because they see men as better able to provide these services.

The same participant went on to explain that a family's preference against women taking up leadership positions within the family is a simple illustration that families mistrust the abilities and the potential of their women. This participant felt that women were being overlooked in many spheres of the *faasamoa*/Samoan life. She referred to the many contributions by women that she feels are not adequately acknowledged. For instance, in the family, women are the main actors and contributors to daily life and well-being:

> *We may not be working, but we cook, iron, wash, advise and nurture the kids to become better people, we ensure that our husbands and brothers are good leaders. How? Through the advice we give them, through the values we instil in them. I look at it from this scenario, you go to someone's place, the minute you enter the house you will be able to identify from the entrance whether there is a woman in that family or not. I am not undermining the men but there will be a great difference* (Participant 3, Interviewed 02.01.2013).

She also referred to the women's contribution to the church,

> *In church, we are the doers, men make decisions but those who put up and run the whole show are the women. In our villages, yes the council of chiefs will just talk, who are the implementers, it's the WOMEN...* (Participant 3, Interviewed 02.01.2013).

However, at the same time she firmly believed that when it comes to decision making, whether it be someone to hold the family title or a leadership position in the church, women have to prove themselves or they will not be chosen.

This participant said that women's advocacy for equality and for preference within family selection and village deliberations is often mistaken by men as women wanting to be heads of families or wanting to dominate men. In her view, it has never been on women's agenda to compete or to take over the power, but rather to have their families appreciate and value women's existence.

> *I have always kept saying I don't want to be better than men. It's not my interest. I don't want to compete with men. I just want men to value women and to see how they can contribute and make the world a better place. I have heard so many negative comments about the government being pro women, women wanting to dominate and to be heads of families. Our plea to be in parliament is just a sense of acknowledgement; it is not my intention and never will be to compete with MEN. We want society to acknowledge that we have the same value as men. I want our government to do justice to the cultural ideology that there is no inequality in Samoa, that being the feagaiga has the same rights as my male siblings.* (Participant 2 Interviewed 02.01.2013)

The findings from the Bureau of Statistics (SBS 2012) as reinforced in the interviews with study participants, indicate that family selection is obviously one of the factors in the disparity in political participation between women and men in Samoa, despite the earlier evidence that portrays the process as democratic and inclusive. Reasons behind family preference for male siblings or for the male lineage to take up chiefly titles, as identified by the study participants, include: lack of trust in the female heirs, *matai*ship being correlated with heavy duties, and access to the *matai* title being seen as a form of reciprocity from the sister to the brother.

In addition to the factors already discussed, participants also mentioned the family's pride and respect for its women. This pattern of thought does in a way create gender disparities but, as these participants see it, Samoan women from their status as the

feagaiga/covenant and the *tamasa*/sacred sibling already have the power to influence any decisions. These honorific salutations demonstrate Samoan women's prestigious ranking in the Samoan social structure and this should be enough for them. The participants further explained that these salutations symbolise the fact that Samoan women are to carry themselves with pride and honour, and are not to do anything that would disgrace their status. According to these participants, politics, in the Samoan view, has a negative connotation and it would be a disgrace for Samoan women to be involved.

One participant illustrated this in her interview,

> *Politics from outside it's a dirty game. A male will go out in terms of politics to persuade candidates, it's almost like prostituting yourself. ... Now for a woman to do that from the inside there is no... it's hard to divide. I think some women don't want to go begging. If someone begs you to come and vote for him/her it's quite different from persuading the chiefs to vote for you. However the most influential component is the Samoan families don't want their girls to go through the dirty process of getting into politics. Women going through this process, as Samoans see it, is like making a mockery of the sister and the brother covenant where the brother does the heavy duties while the sister does the lighter ones. Women doing the campaign work for politics is degrading their value.* (Participant 7, Interviewed 09.01.2013)

Other study participants shared the same thoughts and reservations. These observations again reinforce the argument in this thesis that closer attention to culture is needed to understand the contradictory status of women in Samoa today.

Different study participants expressed the view that it is not fair to blame the family process and the family's preference for males, or even the need to get a *matai* title, as the core reasons why so few women were in politics. They believe other factors should be considered -the attitude of the sisters, and their personal choices.

> *It's wrong to blame not having enough women in politics because of not enough women holding matai titles. This is because there are women who are matais but*

they don't want to take up politics. More importantly to get a matai title for any Samoan, the opportunity is there. This is because whether you are male or female you are seen, received or considered in any of your family's deliberation as a suli and when we talk or discuss family politics we talk as suli, we don't talk as matai or as untitled men, as women or as someone who has married into the family. So the opportunity is there, the question is: Are the women willing to take up the opportunity? I would say only a few women are, but majority they are quite okay with where they are. (Participant 12, Interviewed 15.01.2013)

The crucial role of the family, not only in selecting women, but in needing to support them through a political term once selected, was noted by one of the participants.

…it all starts within your family. For women the aiga is our entry point. If they trust us women, they will confer the chiefly title and that will give us the chance to get involved in the next stage of the game (politics) which is the village council and then politics if we make the commitment. But if our families don't choose us women, for whatever reason then we women will never get anywhere……(Participant 9, Interviewed 23.01.2013).

In Chapter One, different understandings of power for women were discussed. Cox (1996) argued that when power is associated with leadership, authority and participation these concepts were not only unfamiliar to most women but also brought a negative reaction. Negative reactions by women or about women who are in positions of power, according to Cox (1996), were an indication of 'power over' rather than 'power to' dynamics. This plainly illustrates one of the major barriers that face women as they attempt to take on power through participating in public decision making, for example, or through participating in Parliament (Cox 1996, p. 19). One can say that Cox's argument is relevant to the criteria for selecting a family chief. A complicating factor is that power and politics are seen as polluting or putting at risk the honoured high status of Samoan women as the sister or sacred child (qv Chapter Four).

All the study participants agreed that as *suli*, women have the opportunity and the right to stand for Parliament and participate in politics at the village council and at the national level. But they tell a different story when they try to explain some of the

reasons for women's low participation rates in Parliament. One of these reasons appears at first sight paradoxical, that it is family pride and respect for the prestigious status carried by Samoan women which translates into not wanting this status to be contaminated or diminished by them taking on leadership or parliamentary roles. This can have the effect that women are viewed as belonging to the private sphere, whilst men are seen to be more suitable for the public sphere (Stevens 2007). Given that Samoan women historically were warriors, have the family processes around chiefly titles and leadership changed because of influences external to the traditional culture, influences such as economic factors, Christianity and westernisation? A closer examination of other features of Samoan culture may help answer this question.

Village Council/*Faamatai (Matai* System)

The second most crucial process that one has to go through in order to get into politics in Samoa is the *faamatai* or participating in the village council/*faiganuu/faamatai.* The family *matai* represents the family in all the village deliberations and acts as the spokesperson for the family in the village council. All the decisions relating to the family within the village *fono*/village council are made by the family *matai*.

The *matai* system (chiefly system), known as the *faamatai,* is the fundamental village governance structure operating throughout Samoa. Soo (2007) defines this as everything 'to do with the *matai',* and in this he refers to the *matai* attributes such as the *matai* role, responsibilities, decision-making processes, rank, genealogy and associated history, protocols, method of communication, elite language and method of election. In addition, Soo shows that there are certain basic elements that constitute the *faamatai*: the *suafa* (title), *fanua* (lands pertaining to that title), a house site (*tulaga maota* for *alii* or *laoa* for *tulafale), faalupega* (honorific salutation), *aumaga* (leading untitled men associated with the title) and a *tamaitai matua*, the leading female descendant in the society or among village women associated with the title (p. 10).

On the other hand, the *faamatai* was defined by Fairbairn-Dunlop (1991) as the sociometric wheel on which Samoan society turns, or as the comprehensive or high powered system which outlines the regulatory customs which Samoans abide by and follow. Fairbairn-Dunlop further explained that the *faamatai* represented a conceptual

division of the village in which women were the holders and transmitters of *mana*/sacred power, while men held the secular power or *pule* (p. 172). According to Fairbairn-Dunlop, in the context of Samoa's past, sacred and secular domains were of equal importance and consequently represented equal opportunities for status enhancement. In most villages, both women and men are allowed to become *matai* (chiefs), but, as already noted, the practice is that *matai* titles are largely bestowed on male family members.

Soo (2007) expanded Fairbairn-Dunlop's argument and argued that the *faamatai* is not just a socio-political system with its established structures and a mode of operation under the leadership of a *matai* but it is also an encompassing system in that it is a way of life and a way of doing things. Soo demonstrates that eventhough the *faamatai* revolves around a *matai* (chief), it provides the focal point that brings together in an orderly manner all members of families, villages and Samoa as a nation (Soo 2007, p. 11). In the words of one participant:

> *The faamatai is what makes Samoa different from all the other islands of the Pacific region. It's what holds our country together. If you investigate the main supporting factor behind a stable political system, stability, peace and harmony within society today….it's the faamatai. If you look at the issues behind political systems in the other island nations like Fiji, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, I would argue that they are experiencing those because of the breakdown in the traditional governing systems and for that I applaud our faamatai. The faamatai puts things into perspective within the Samoan structure; it outlines the everyday life of Samoan people and sets the rules and procedures for each and everyone to abide by in their daily lives. I'm sure every Samoan knows and values it. It's what makes them Samoan* (Participant 15, Interviewed 29.01.2013).

Some study participants believed that, despite the fact that the family plays an important role in Samoan women's participation in politics, the most important agent for getting women into politics is the *faamatai,* getting involved and being part of the village council. They commented that once the family selection is finished, there is an obligation for the family chief to serve on the village council. The village council or the *faamatai* is the local platform where a chief practices and puts into action their

leadership or decision-making skills, not just on decisions pertaining to his or her specific family but in decisions and leadership for the whole village.

> *Yes I do believe that everything starts from the family but with regards to politics I strongly believe that the faamatai is the key player. You know how things operate in the faasamoa, everything is done collectively not on an individual basis. The process of running for parliament in Samoa is that a person either expresses interest to the village council or he or she is nominated by the council of chiefs. But the candidate will have to get the approval of the whole village to stand for election. Again its collective, you have to go through the village council because you will be representing the whole village not yourself or your family. Your family will select you to become the family matai and the testing of that title is active participation in the council of chiefs as the forum where all the village politics is discussed.* (Participant 17, Interviewed 27.01.2013)

In the literature on Pacific island politics, the *faamatai* has been identified as having a crucial role at all levels. For instance, Lawson (1996) presents Tagaloa Pita's viewpoint where he compared the *faamatai* to the system of electing the president in the United States. According to Tagaloa's belief cited in Lawson (1996) the *matai* system effectively comprises an electoral college. According to Lawson, Tagaloa stressed the consensual aspect of the Samoan system, where the *matai* holds a political office and has to be accepted unanimously by all the heirs. According to Lawson (1996), Tagaloa argued that the one vote from one person is a farce because it does not produce democracy. The introduction of universal suffrage (in 1990) gave everyone the right to vote, but not everyone the right to stand for election (p. 152).

In addition, the *faamatai,* as the governing system in Samoa, had a great deal of impact on the governing laws of the country so that reference is made to it in most of the legal frameworks. This applies even in formal politics where the *faamatai* is the guiding principle in the electoral act. Originally only *matai* were allowed to exercise their voting rights and were eligible to run as candidates for politics. However, the introduction of universal suffrage in 1990 allowed non-*matai* the right to vote. This action by the government was regarded as a significant achievement because it not only allowed

women from the age of 21 to vote but also the non-*matai,* who are the majority of the Samoan population. Tagaloa referred to universal suffrage in Samoa as 'bait for women' and saw it as a political ploy on the part of the ruling electoral party of the time to retain power. Another criticism of universal suffrage, according to Lawson (1996), is the argument that eventhough the government moved immediately to amend the electoral act, the fact that the *matai*-only eligibility for candidature remained in place was a sign of only partial democratisation in Samoa.

Some study participants expressed similar misgivings but the majority argued that the *faamatai* should be upheld, not just at the local level or the village level but also at the national level. The *faamatai* was even singled out by one participant as one of the crucial aspects of the *faasamoa*/Samoan way of life, as being what identifies us as Samoans.

Perhaps it is too early to pass judgement on whether or not this electoral system, adopted from countries that differ from Samoa socially, politically, economically and spiritually, helps the advancement of women in Samoa. Even though this system has its limitations, it does mark a beginning with the potential for positive change. To draw more on Samoan cultural values, such as loyalty and love for your family, may counteract the increasing use of money during the election process. Many of the changes that have impacted on the *faamatai* need much more detailed research and further investigation. According to those interviewed for this study, these changes include changes in people's attitudes towards power, and a greater focus on the personal attributes and personality of the person holding the title.

As one of the participants said:

> *From my experience that is a very nice arrangement but I don't know of that*
> *many villages that are still practicing that, practicing that the village of men has*
> *equal power with the village of women. It's no longer there. That is what we*
> *practiced in the olden days but people's attitudes have changed and I think it's*
> *those dynamics that are changing. So these are the dynamics of our time that are*
> *making it difficult to realise that ideal we are talking about. It's logical and it*
> *was probably that way. So eventhough this matai system is inherited; there is*

also a lot to do with the personality of the person that is holding the office from time to time. (Participant 17, Interviewed 19.01.2013).

The Samoan *faamatai* is one element of the *faasamoa* which is not static. As societies experience development and successive waves of globalisation, cultural practices and the systems which support them change. As the people who are the forces within these systems expose themselves to technological change, education and wealth, their perceptions change and alter the way they do things. For example, there have been cases where wealth and money have overridden the principles of the *faamatai* and have impacted the electoral system and parts of Samoan society.

As I have argued, the *faamatai* is an aspect of Samoan culture that is blamed for the low representation of women in politics. The Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (2005) in both of its UNCEDAW reports on the status of women in Samoa indicated that some of the village taboos towards women holding *matai* titles are also contributing factors to the low representation of women in politics.

Some of the study participants relate this back to the sister and brother relationship, where the sister is referred to as the sacred sibling. This relationship is based on the concept of *va/*space between people, where one has to respect the other. It is this principle that the men or the male *matai* apply within village gatherings. One of the participants explained that it is not that the brothers or men don't want their sisters to be involved but they are just very protective over this space between their sisters and themselves, and the sacred status of their sister. There are times when matters discussed in the village council may become very heated, to the extent of using phrases which would not be acceptable to say in front of their sisters. In other situations the men use mocking phrases or taboo language to spice up discussion within the council. This is the nature of politics. In the view of the old men, if their sisters participate in village council/*faamatai* deliberations, then they will have to watch their language everytime they speak. So in order for them not to influence or disgrace their relationship with their sisters, they believe that it is better for the sisters not to get the *matai* titles which would bring them into the village councils.

A number of study participants rejected this rationale on the basis that the village taboo against women being *matai* only applied in nine villages. These participants explained that the underlying principle of the *faasamoa*/Samoan culture with regards to women's participation in decision-making, whether in the family or the village council/*faamatai,* is that women as heirs of families and villages have equal rights to men. According to them, this is both the culture and general practice. The taboo or prohibition put in place by some villages is known in the Samoan context as an *agaifanua*, a protocol carried out by a specific village. The participants do not see these prohibitions as part of the *faasamoa* but rather as man-made laws to suit local needs.

A study participant said:

> *I don't agree with the argument of village taboo as a barrier to women getting matai titles. This is because there are only a few villages (about 9) in all Samoa that do this. Not only that but I would also argue that that is not the aganuu/culture rather an agaifanua/village taboo. So the culture is what is the general practice and agaifanua pertains to a specific village or family. It's not culture, rather these are man-made laws. However I strongly believed that it is slowly changing. If not in this five years maybe in the next ten years it will change*. (Participant 11, Interviewed 12.01.2013)

Following on from the idea that these are man-made rules, participants referred to the Samoan proverb *'E tele aa o le tagata pei o aa o le laau',* 'Samoan people have many families, like the tree with many roots', An individual does not have just one family. So, for example, if a Samoan woman is living in her father's mother's village and if that particular village has a ban on women receiving the *matai* title then she always has the right to look to her other family connections for a title, either from her father's side or her mother's side.

There are both negatives and positives to be drawn from looking at the village taboos that hinder Samoan women's full participation in politics. On a positive note, I support the argument that as Samoans we have to put in place measures that maintain and sustain our cultural traditions, because these are what defines us. However, a more inclusive approach could have been taken by these villages, rather than imposing man-

made rules that reflect men's interests. I strongly believe that the Samoan language has wealth in itself. Instead of imposing a taboo, it is possible to allow women to exercise their rights to full participation, and to use appropriate or respectful language when discussing issues that may cause disruptions to the space between the brother and the sister in their relationship. Imposing a taboo is putting in place what Stevens (2007, p. 23)calls conventional distinctions which not only guard the domestic against incursions from the state but also keep Samoan women away from the realm of the public sphere. This action simply violates the human rights of Samoan women as citizens of Samoa, and as *suli* of their families and villages.

Overall the discussion on the *faamatai* has drawn attention to the many aspects that have changed overtime and are continuing to change. Yet the comments from the study participants also highlight its crucial role in getting women into politics. It is clear that the *faamatai* has undergone many changes and as the world evolves, as different people with different personalities represent families from time to time, as different perceptions and different directions of leadership and decisions are explored, the *faamatai* also evolves. But recognising these changes and all the influencing factors should not mean abandoning Samoan values and beliefs. A better way forward to increase women's political roles would be to find an effective way to compromise, so that we will not be biased either towards modern ways or towards culture and tradition.

Second, the *faamatai* needs to be more women-friendly. There is no point in families bestowing a title on their women when they are not allowed in the village council. Many women have *matai* titles but most of them do not want to get involved in the *faamatai*. Some of the reasons for this, as identified by study participants, are that women feel that they are not well-versed in the oratory dialect, or they lack self-confidence, or they do not want to step out of their comfort zone. One of the participants illustrated this by stating:

> *There are two things. First there is the need for the village fono to encourage women to participate at the local level politics or faiganuu. So we need to ensure that there are no limitations for women like village taboos and such. It's pointless having families honour their women with titles if they don't get to that very important stage. This is because you can't run as a candidate just coming*

from your family. NO, you have to participate actively in the village council/faamatai. You know how things work; all candidates are nominated by the council of chiefs. Secondly there is a great need to encourage our women who hold titles to go back to the villages and get involved in the village politics. We have many women matai but they are not considered because they don't want to be part of the faiganuu or faamatai. This is because the women feel uncomfortable since they feel they are not well versed with oratory language, some of them are just not confident enough and some women just don't want to step out of their comfort zone. (Participant 17, Interviewed 25.01.2013)

What aspects of Samoan culture would assist women in becoming more assertive and be more active so as to be considered for political roles?

The *faamatai* and Christianity

According to Temese et al (2012), life before colonisation in Samoa was just primitive and simple (Temese et al. 2012, p. 503). By this they were suggesting that before colonisation the Samoan way of living was very simple, people's life styles were simple, their diets were fish, indigenous chicken and taro for instance, and diabetes was uncommon. The cultural values were very strong and upheld by all and the society was stable. However, as in many countries, globalisation has to some degree widened the gap between the rich and the poor (Temese et al. 2012). It has taken away or decreased the community voice of both majority and minority groups within society by creating gaps and changing the dynamic of spatial relationships between people or between people and nature. In some cases, the process to reignite these community voices or community power includes a real attempt to bring back traditions, to reinvent the traditional way of doing things, to revive the cultural norms and values or to reassess the principle idea behind these norms.

In the previous chapter, I referred to globalisation as a long process that includes the spread of Christianity. Christianity has had a huge impact on the way Samoans live and their belief systems. According to the study participants, it has brought both negative and positive changes to Samoa. On the one hand, there has been the conversion of the Samoans from what was described by Meleisea (1992) as *faanuupo*, 'living in the dark

age', where Samoans worshipped superstitious Gods and practiced cannibalism. On the other hand, as documented in this chapter and the previous chapter, Christianity has transformed some of the family dynamics in selecting the chiefly title holder. Study participants describe these impacts on the village council system and their effect on women as being heavily influenced by the missionaries who brought Christianity into Samoa. These participants believed that, because Christianity originated from England, where the oppression of women was very strong at the time, a negative culture was introduced into Samoa. The teaching that men are the head of family was a change to the pre-Christian mindset of Samoans and it led to a belief that men are superior in all aspects of society.

One of the participants elaborated on this:

> *I blame the coming of missionaries to Samoa as the root of the problem or what looks like a problem. I will say this, in Samoa all mankind is equal but if you look at it today, it's when the missionaries came to Samoa about the 19th century that caused a lot of changes. The evidence for this statement is, for instance one of the roles and responsibilities of a Samoan tamaitai was that they didn't go into the kitchen. But the missionaries brought with them their custom in England where there was a lot of oppression of women and this caused a lot of huge changes in our society. Another example is the use of the word 'fafine' for the bible translation Now in the Samoan vocabulary there is no such word. We call the Samoan ladies and women 'tamaitai' but if you look at the bible the missionaries didn't use the word 'tamaitai.' WHY? Because they don't want equality in Samoa to be obvious. So I strongly blame the coming of missionaries because it was in their time that culture and society were restructured. For instance they pushed women and said that women's place is in the kitchen and encouraged men to take on the decision making roles* (Participant 19, Interviewed 27.01.2013)

The act of accepting Christianity and conversion can be portrayed as Samoans favouring a foreign culture over their original one. In my opinion this was a huge move and it indicates the strength of the colonial powers in manipulating the ideas and the mindset of indigenous communities and primitive cultures. The Christian values and concepts

were perceived as better values. I believe that it was this perception that has changed the way Samoan people see things, the way they live their everyday lives, and it has had a significant impact on women.

Electoral System

One of the barriers Meredith (2013) alludes to as among the impediments to more women participating in Pacific parliaments is the electoral system. Meredith refers to the *matai*ship component in the electoral act as a barrier to women who genuinely have the potential and desire for politics but don't want to become a *matai*. Soo and Fraenkel (2005) further explain that Samoa's electoral system comprises a unique blend of colonially inherited democratic rules and customary political institutions. The Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (2014) has described Samoa's electoral system as hybrid, because it utilises a first past the post voting system for the majority of constituencies and a block vote for a number of multi-member constituencies. The first past the post based voting system is used in thirty seven single member constituencies. Within this system voters are allowed a single vote for a single member and the candidate with the largest number of vote wins. The remaining six constituencies utilise a block voting system. Within this block vote system, voters are allowed additional votes corresponding to the number of members in the electorate. Voters have as many votes as there are seats, and the candidates with the largest number of votes win.

Before independence, Samoa chose an electoral system in which only a *matai*/chief could vote or stand as a candidate. This system was condemned by the international community as a violation of the principle of universal franchise enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. However, Samoa held on to its beliefs and the *faamatai,* and continued with this electoral system for a number of years. According to Soo and Fraenkel's (2005) discussion of this issue, the only adjustment the Samoan government made was to modify the electoral rules at village level so that from the 1960s to the 1980s the villages increased the number of *matai* titles conferred (Soo and Fraenkel 2005, p. 334).

This electoral system, with only *matai* allowed to vote and stand as candidates, continued until the popular referendum in 1990, where Samoa as a country decided to open the franchise so that all citizens would be able to vote (Soo and Fraenkel 2005, p. 334). However, the new electoral law retained the traditional rule that only *matai* are eligible for candidacy. Soo and Fraenkel (2005) also outline other impacts from that referendum. These include a dramatic fall in the number of non-contested elections, a decline in the turnover of incumbents and a move towards a more competitive political process culminating in the development of a fluid party-based system. The party system has widened gender inequality gaps in terms of participation, as more men who are paramount chiefs have become parliamentarians. Samoan women have become more disadvantaged and their role is seen as providing support to their husbands or brothers who are parliamentarians.

Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon (2008) analysed Kenworthy and Malami's study of the factors that contribute to inequality in women's representation in politics. Part of Kenworthy and Malami's study looked at relevant models for promoting women's participation in politics. Beckfield, Viterna, and Fallon's analysis shows that the existing models do a poor job in identifying factors which promote women's political representation in developing nations. Beckfield *et al* (2008) then continue on to argue that only the effect of a proportional representation electoral system remains significant across samples of both rich and poor nations with the other variables considered appearing to work only in wealthy nations.

While universal suffrage gave the right to vote to all Samoans aged 21 and above, including non *matai* and the entire female population, the retention of the *matai* requirement for candidacy still creates a significant hurdle for the entry of Samoan women into politics. Samoa's mixed electoral system has widened the gap between men and women as far as parliamentary representation is concerned. Unlike other countries of the world, where a woman can stand for parliament so long as she is a citizen, Samoan women still have a specific requirement or a specific hurdle to overcome, in order for them to stand as candidates. It is clear that a Samoan woman cannot fully exercise equal rights under the existing electoral system.

On the other hand, the decision of the Samoans to retain and blend their inherited customary political institutions into their electoral laws is a classic example of a developing country which has stood firm to uphold its cultural values and systems. Provided that more women are willing to take up *matai* titles and participate actively in the *faamatai* system, it is possible that the Samoan approach may be taken as an example that can work and be adopted in other developing countries. The retention of the *matai* requirement for candidacy may look like a hurdle but I believe that it also symbolically reminds Samoan women that, as heirs, nothing is stopping them from obtaining *matai* titles, that their powers as sisters and as wives do not have to be indirect but that these powers could be direct through getting a title and running as a candidate. One of the study participants alluded to this in the interview:

> *The law is there but I think we misunderstood or misinterpreted it as a barrier. The way I see it is, it's an indication that Samoa has high respect and places high value on the faasamoa. So what they did, they ensured it's incorporated in our legal framework. Our forefathers ensured that each individual practices it on a day to day basis. There is nothing stopping women from getting matai titles, the opportunity is there, so I think it's just a matter of getting that title to get in.* (Participant 15, Interviewed 20.01.2013).

It is clear that there is inequality in Samoa with reference to women's political participation. Yet it is also evident, that in contrast to women in other parts of the world, there are processes that Samoan women can go through first at the family level and village level in order to get into politics. From the interviews it appears that these processes have been compromised by factors such as Christianity, by changes that over time have influenced the power relations and power dynamics and by the increase in higher education and the role of wealth. The next chapter will examine other factors from outside Samoa which are not relevant to the cultural context of Samoa but which have had an impact on women and their political participation, eg the adoption of international regulations and national frameworks.

CHAPTER 6

BALANCING POWER:
THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SAMOA

The overall focus of this thesis is on identifying the factors that may constrain or encourage Samoan women's participation in parliament, with a particular focus on the cultural influences. This focus originates from the writer's experience in growing up in the culture being researched, the Samoan culture, where there is a very strong ideology that there is no gender disparity in Samoa. However this ideology is not reflected in the current low numbers of women in parliament. This particular chapter focuses on the difficulties involved in balancing the representation of both genders in politics and on the roles of the Samoan government, non-government organisations (NGO) and the international community, from the perspective of the twenty-one Samoans who participated in this study. The data provides insight into what the Samoan government and other institutions have done to promote a rights-based approach derived from international frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The focus is on how the objectives of these international frameworks, either contradict, challenge or support Samoan cultural ideals in promoting women's rights, particularly women's participation in politics.

The discussion in this chapter reinforces some of the views covered in previous chapters; the role of colonialism, for example, which introduced its monetary system and adopted laws that have influenced the family system to the disadvantage of women getting into politics. Furthermore, it will strengthen previous arguments on the contradictions between Samoa's ideal perceptions about the status of women and the limitations of global human rights frameworks, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The chapter will also discuss how Christianity influences the human rights frameworks on the role and the rights of the Samoan *tamaitai* as the sister/*feagaiga,* and how each concept interacts with the other. Lastly, it will explore how the formal political procedures adopted by Samoa affect women's access and full participation in politics.

This chapter argues that recognising and harnessing women's active participation in local level politics will generate a greater level of acceptance for women's political participation at the national and international level. It is also important to note that government, non-government organisations and the international community often overlook the fact that achieving gender equality, whether in decision-making positions or in other areas, requires time and genuine collaboration, not just establishing universal goals and targets. Moreover, as I have argued throughout this thesis, attention must be paid to micro-level politics and the complex interactions of different cultural contexts if women's participation is to increase, and be accepted and embraced.

Gender and the Pacific

The Pacific region is made up of independent island countries, colonial territories, which include French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Wallis and Futuna Islands, and states with almost complete sovereignty but still associated with the colonial power, New Zealand, like Cook Islands, Tokelau and Niue. All the independent island countries went through colonial experiences before independence. These island countries are widely dispersed over the Pacific Ocean and vary in size, geographical conditions, resources, populations and cultures (Griffen 2006). Increasing urbanisation is common to all the island states, resulting in a growing proportion of their populations residing in cities and towns. However Pacific populations are largely rural, living in isolated, often small communities, where family and village relations are the dominant feature of island life. Nevertheless urbanisation has changed fundamental social conditions affecting men, women and children in the family, the household, the community and at national levels.

Evidence from the preceding chapters' shows that colonisation, which brought economic and social transformation and Christianity, still has a significant impact on the Pacific island cultures today. Many laws introduced in the colonial period remain unchanged in Pacific legal systems today and have entrenched gender inequality in the region. These laws are the focus of Pacific women's rights advocacy for legislative change (Zetlin 2014). All of this background information is an important reference point for any discussion of Pacific cultures and gender. It is also important to note that

there is great diversity in Pacific cultures, even within cultures and that cultures change and evolve, rather than remaining static (Griffen 2006; Zetlin 2014). Popular discourses in the Pacific on culture and social change often begin with the premise that Pacific culture is unchanging and needs to be preserved, or that social change, particularly changes in gender or women's position, will produce irrevocable damage to the Pacific way of life and culture. In reality, Pacific cultures have experienced profound change for decades and will continue to do so (Griffen 2006). However, one of the main arguments mounted in Chapter Three of this thesis is that the unique qualities of the *faasamoa*/Samoan culture on equality should remain unchanged.

Gender inequality is not specific to Samoa alone but rather is a global phenomenon. The diversity of the *faasamoa,* the influence of colonialisation, globalisation and Christianity make it difficult to develop an appropriate theoretical model about gender inequality that fits Samoa's circumstances and cultural landscape. However the assumption that the context is the same wherever you are from the Pacific region, always needs to be challenged. As Mohanty (2003a) reminds us, in any discussion of gender, attention must be given to the micropolitics of context, as well as global economic processes. Since most of the existing work on the inequality of women in Pacific politics is concerned with the Melanesian islands in the Pacific region, this chapter underlines the need for specific research on the Polynesian islands, to counteract further generalisations about the Pacific.

Addressing gender in the Pacific region is a journey itself, a journey of real challenges, from combating people's perceptions based on cultural ideologies versus human rights based limitations, to colonial impacts and economic constraints as well as contextualising the global conflicts, tensions or successes to suit the local context. To highlight this complexity, two current examples are useful. During my research, my friends working across the region sent me links to interesting articles on the latest developments on the issue of gender in the Polynesian countries. One article from Tonga by Dr. Mikaele Paunga, a Professor of Catholic Theology is provocatively titled 'CEDAW has hidden agendas'. Without knowing what the acronym stands for, Dr. Paunga refers to CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women) as a foreign culture, arguing that 'CEDAW may have achieved its purpose already'. According to Paunga, this purpose is simply to

'divide and rule. This is the colonial principle.'(Paunga 2015). The article asks: 'Why on earth is the government so determined to sign up for CEDAW when people do not really know what it is? Why is the government in a hurry to sign and allow a foreign culture to be established in Tonga? Will it [Tonga] benefit financially from it [CEDAW] and if so, how?'(Paunga 2015).Dr Paunga's view represents the frustrations and fear often typical of those who have a strong belief in indigenous Pacific cultures. Calling CEDAW a 'foreign culture' reaffirms one of the most popular discourses: that Pacific culture is unchanging and needs to be preserved at all cost; that the introduction of social change, especially regarding the position of women will damage the Pacific way of life or culture. This discourse is based on the dominant male perspective that women's place is in the private sphere and that it is inappropriate for them to be in the public realm. The questions posed by Dr Paunga support his belief as a male Catholic Christian in a position of authority that the Tongan government needs to do more work before CEDAW is adopted, as well as demanding answers before such actions taken place. The questions raised in this article highlight some of the tensions around the reality of addressing gender and development issues and the current challenges in introducing global human rights frameworks into the Pacific region.

The other example came from my participant observation. I overheard my family's conversation about a newspaper article on a study by the National University of Samoa aimed at understanding the barriers to women's political participation in Samoa (Chan Mow *et al.* 2015). The study discussed in the newspaper article concluded, firstly, that the system of traditional village government in Samoa presents significant barriers that limit women's access to and participation in decision-making forums in local government councils, church leadership, school management and community based organisations. It argued that, without significant participation in leadership and decision making at the village level, it is difficult for women to become or to be seen as national leaders. The study findings also blamed many cultural factors as obstacles to women standing for parliament- the traditional division of labour, where authority is vested in men, the low number of women with titles, the low number of women *matai* who actually sit and participate actively in village council meetings and gatherings, and the sister and brother relation known as the *feagaiga*/covenant. According to the newspaper article, this study had been recently discussed in Samoan parliament and the Prime Minister of Samoa had claimed that most of what was written in this report is

'nonsense'. It is the Prime Minister's belief that there is only one council in the Samoan traditional structure and that is the council of chiefs/*fonoaalii ma faipule* and within the Samoan cultural context all decisions regarding any issue are made within that one and only platform (*Samoa Observer*, 12 July 2015). In the very next edition of the newspaper, the head researcher, the Director of the Centre for Samoan Studies of the National University of Samoa, challenged the Prime Minister to clarify his allegations and provided the evidence for the study's recommendations. As a reader, a citizen and a Samoan postgraduate student researching the political representation of women, I felt that the views expressed by the top political figure in the country contradict current developments and the many reports that declare the Samoan government's full commitment and support for promoting gender equality in politics and in all other areas. The Prime Minister's comments raise the question as to how genuine Samoa's commitment to promoting gender equality is. His response clearly articulated a strong male reaction to the concept of gender equality and showed that the generally shared attitude across the globe applies also to Samoan men.

These two articles are indicative of the dominant features of the current situation in the Pacific region regarding the issue of political representation of women. Moreover, they also highlight some of the real challenges in addressing gender in the Pacific region. Not surprisingly, in the tension between protecting cultural values and human rights, these articles and much public discourse come down on the side of culture, rather than on the side of protecting the concept of rights.

Obstacles to women's participation in politics in Samoa

The representation of women in the Samoan parliament and in other levels of decision making is considered very low by United Nations standards. A study conducted by the National University of Samoa documented the lack of women participating in local level politics or village councils, the low numbers of women in government boards, the low numbers of women Chief Executive Officers, both in government and in the private sector, the negative attitudes towards women running for politics, cultural ideologies and the influence of Christianity (Chan Mow *et al.*2015). As discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis, women who want to run for politics find that the political, cultural and social environment is often unfriendly or even hostile. In the words of one

of this study's participant *'it's like prostituting yourself'*. The data collected clearly indicates that because of globalisation and the societal changes experienced through the years, Samoan women frequently face obstacles in articulating and expressing their own interests. The discussion that follows will identify the obstacles Samoan women face in entering parliament, some of the strategies taken to overcome these obstacles, and how these strategies are analysed and perceived by the Samoans interviewed for this study.

1. Political Obstacles

Soo and Fraenkel (2005), as discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis, explained that the electoral system from Samoa's independence until the popular referendum of 1990 allowed only chiefs (the overwhelming majority of whom are men) to vote and become candidates. The 1990 referendum granted full rights to vote to all Samoan women aged twenty-one and over. However, women were still restricted in their eligibility for candidacy. Ballington and Karam's (2005) theory of electoral rights states that the right to stand for election, the right to become a candidate and to get elected is based on the right to vote. In the case of Samoa, even though the electoral act allows women to vote, their right to become candidates remains restricted because of the criteria that one has to be a chief/*matai*. Therefore the majority of candidates have always been male. This low representation of women could be considered a violation of women's democratic rights and a violation of their basic human rights.

1.1. Masculine model

These political obstacles give men the opportunity to exercise their rights fully so that 'men dominate the political arena, men formulate the rules of the political game; and men define the standards for evaluation....' (Ballington and Karam2005, p.34.) In the view of one of the study participants:

> *….men dominate things; not only in villages, families, churches but the government. Many opportunities are obtained by males but fewer opportunities are given to the women. …… Even for leadership positions within families, churches and villages, it seems that women are still being oppressed/under pressure* (Participant 3,Interviewed 12.12. 2012).

According to Ballington and Karam (2005), this domination may result in women either rejecting politics altogether or rejecting the male style of politics. The views above illustrate that politics is often based on the idea of competition, of winners and losers, where women are always disadvantaged because the political systems are based on male norms and values. So inequality persists, in traditional societies and in developed countries.

1.2. Politics as a 'dirty game'

Politics was described in Chapter Five by one of the study participants as a dirty game, no different from prostitution. The high value and dignity that Samoan society accords its women as compared to the perceived nature of politics make it difficult for all Samoans to easily accept women's involvement in politics.

> *Politics from outside it's a dirty game. A male will go out of their way to persuade candidates. It's almost like prostituting yourself. Men also bribe people because they have no fear of the law and no fear of the Lord. Now for a woman to do that from the inside there is no… it's hard to divide. I think some women don't want to go begging. If someone begs you to come and vote for him/her it's quite different from persuading the chiefs to vote for you. However the most influential component is that Samoan families don't want their girls to go through the dirty process of getting into politics. Women going through this process, as Samoans see it, is like making a mockery of the sister and the brother covenant where the brother does the heavy duties while the sister does the lighter ones. Women doing the campaign work for politics is degrading their value(Participant 7, Interviewed 09.01.2013).*

The above explanation highlights one of the most influential beliefs that not only stops women from actively participating in the election process but also gives a reason for Samoans to not support or encourage women to participate in decision-making processes.

2. Ideological barriers

Ideological barriers that came through clearly in the data collected and discussed in previous chapters include the Samoan perception of gender, the social roles assigned to men and women, women's lack of confidence that holds them back from becoming family chiefs and from actively participating in village councils, and women's perception of politics as a dirty game. How does this sit alongside the cultural claim that there is no gender inequality in Samoa? This claim is contradicted by the reality of the low number of women currently in the Samoan parliament, the low number of women holding *matai*/chiefly titles, the low number of women heading government Ministries, government bodies, government and private sector corporations.

2.1. Traditional Roles

Chapter Three explained the Samoan ideology that there is no gender inequality, based on the argument that the status of the Samoan woman as a sister/*feagaiga* and *tamasa*/sacred child is more prestigious than their male counterpart. This was later contested in Chapter Four which showed how the role of the sister and the sacred child was degraded due to the introduction of Christianity, which emphasises the primary roles of women as mothers and wives. Part of the discussion in Chapter Three was on the different roles assigned to the individual genders. The duty of decision making was considered a heavy task and so automatically assigned to men. The assertion that decision making is a masculine responsibility places Samoa in the same category as the many societies around the world that are dominated by the ideology that a woman's place is in the home and they should only play the role of birthing and nurturing.

2.2. Lack of Confidence

Women's lack of confidence was another barrier identified by participants as hindering Samoan women's participation at all levels of decision making. In the view of the participants, women lack the confidence to take up chiefly titles because they lack the oratory skills which are seen as the most important aspect of being a chief. So when women are offered the honour to take on chiefly titles by their families, they refuse. As

one participant stated, women need to be more aggressive to take up the challenge, for they are equal to men, and only they can fight for their rights.

Increasing women's political representation

The government of Samoa has always been one of the most active in the Pacific region in promoting gender equality in all areas of life and particularly in terms of women's political representation, both before and since ratifying the United Nations CEDAW in 1992. Since then the government of Samoa, through reports to the UN and in other regional and national reports, has shown that it believes much progress has been made in all areas of women's development (Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development 2014). In these reports the Samoan government clearly outlines the position of women within the *faasamoa*/the Samoan way of life. However, despite these reports, the United Nations Committee on CEDAW still questions and directs the government of Samoa to increase the participation of Samoan women in politics. They have determined that, in all areas of decision making, Samoan women are disadvantaged (UN Women 2005).

So this chapter will now examine what the government of Samoa and its partners, which include the NGOs, have done within the CEDAW framework to increase the political representation of women. It will also look at how these foreign frameworks have been perceived by the Samoan community, considering the Samoan ideology on gender equality. Particular focus is placed on CEDAW, as being the international framework pushing most actively for more women to participate in politics. But actions taken before Samoa ratified this particular convention will also be reviewed.

New trends

The current discussion on the role of government, NGOs and its partners in ensuring gender equality in politics, puts a strong focus on increasing the electoral and parliamentary skills of prospective women political candidates. Because of CEDAW, a special temporary measure has been taken that establishes a 10% quota for Samoan women in parliament (http://www.un.org/womenwatch). In addition, the Australian Government through the Pacific Women Shaping Pacific Development program has

allocated A$3.8 million to the Samoan Women Shaping Development Project to implement nation-wide programs focusing on increasing the participation of women in politics (www.pacificwomen.org).

However, a study by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (Chan Mow 2015) identified the low number of women with chiefly titles and the low number of women actively participating in village councils as the major barriers to women getting into politics. There is very little focus on initiatives to encourage women to participate in local political platforms at the village council level where there are very strong cultural values that could provide women a gateway into politics. As this thesis attempts to show, there is a need for more sustainable programs across all sectors, but most importantly at the village level, to encourage women to take up politics and to be more involved in decision-making avenues.

Gender equality in the Pacific region

Global efforts to address gender inequality date back to the late 20th century. The outcomes of these global actions are in the form of declarations, agreements and conventions outlining the direction nations and the global community should follow to achieve equality for men and women at all levels.

One of the most frequently recognised outcomes is the Beijing Declaration adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 (UN Women 2015). This declaration enshrined full recognition of women's rights and fundamental freedoms, and demands for progress towards gender equality in education and health care, in work and the family, and in the public sphere. Norris and Inglehart (2004) note that the government reports presented during this international forum showed that women mobilised at the grassroots, national and international level to motivate government agencies and non-profit organisations to incorporate these agendas into national programs for action. The outcomes of these actions were reviewed by the United Nations and the official report published in conjunction with the 1995 Fourth World Conference suggested that substantive advances had occurred in many important spheres. These advances included greater access to education, health care and reproductive services, improvements in human rights, and greater recognition of the issues of domestic violence and sexual

trafficking. However, progress worldwide has proved most difficult to achieve in women's representation in the top levels of government (Norris and Inglehart 2004).

United Nations (UN) reports (http://www.un.org/womenwatch) indicate that 165 countries worldwide have so far ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). CEDAW, which came into force in 1981, is currently the most comprehensive treaty on women's human rights. It calls for equality between women and men in all civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights and emphasises the importance of equal participation of women with men in public life. The countries that are parties to the Convention are obligated to ensure women equal opportunities in the right to vote and be eligible for election. However, periodic reviews over the years show that there remains a wide gap between these official declarations and the actual representation of women in public life. This is confirmed by statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) showing that the percentage of women in parliaments in the different regions remains extremely small: the Americas (27.6%), Europe including Nordic countries (25.6%), Europe excluding Nordic countries (24.4%), Sub Sahara African region (22.9%) (Asia (18.8%) and the Pacific region (16.0%) (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2016). The under-representation of women in politics is a reality worldwide. Many scholars have provided explanations: Karam (1998); Kenworthy and Malami (1999); Corbett and Liki (2015); Baker (2014); Fraenkel (2006); Huffer (2006); and Inglehart and Norris (2001). Possible correlations or contributing factors identified range from the degree of industrialisation a country has experienced, political ideology, the type of electoral system adopted, importance of cultural attitudes and social structure, maternal attitudes of the mother and Christianity, to name only a few.

According to Inglehart and Norris (2001) in 'Cultural Obstacles to Equal Participation',

> Several explanations have been offered to account for the continuing dearth of women in political leadership: structural factors, including levels of socioeconomic development and the proportion of women in professional and managerial occupations; the impact of political institutions, such as the electoral systems based on proportional representation; and cultural factors, like the predominance of traditional attitudes towards gender roles (p.127)

It would be a mistake to suggest that life for women living in the Pacific islands is uniformly similar to the life lived by women in other parts of the world. It would also be a mistake to suggest that life for women within the three sub groups of the Pacific, namely Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia are uniform. It is fair to state that the women's experience and privileges will depend on the sub region a woman belongs to. As Drage (1995) has pointed out, this is due to the fact that the Pacific region is culturally heterogeneous and physically isolated in a way that creates and sustains a variation in lifestyles. However, while there is no homogeneity, similarities and uniformities do exist within some parts of the Pacific region, particularly with access to land and chiefly titles. A classic example of the similarities and uniformities are the identification of some countries of the Pacific region as patriarchal societies with the others as matrilineal communities. Societies are considered patriarchy by the supremacy of the male figure or when the recognition of descent and inheritance within society is through the male line. Matrilineal societies on the other hand are noted as such based on or tracing descent and inheritance through the maternal line. For instance, 2/3 of Papua New Guinea (one of the Melanesian countries) is known as patrilineal communities or those who inherited the land through male lineage or majority of traditional decisions are male dominated whilst 1/3 is only matrilineal where land is inherited through the mothers. This is very similar to Vanuatu, another Melanesian country, where the other parts of the country are patrilineal whilst the others are matrilineal (Naupa 2009). In the case of the kingdom of Tonga, one of the Polynesian countries, it is similar to some parts of Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, in the sense that Tonga is mainly a male dominated society. However, all the lands belongs to the Crown, women who are the first born known as the "*fahu*" and have some specific privileges and rights, yet importantly, they don't have any land inheritance at all (Singh 2001, p 5).

However, Samoa is very different from the three countries discussed above. It is different in the sense that it is neither a patrilineal nor a matrilineal society but an inclusive culture and a society where women are prestigious than its men. It doesn't fit under matrilineal nor patrilineal because tracing descents and inheritance of resources such as land and titles is not through the male nor maternal lineage but through heir/suli. Le Tagaloa in her book titled "FAASINOMAGA" discussed this clearly:

Na taua i le faasologa o poutu toa o le Faasinomaga e faapea, o le igoamatai (matai title) o le pule lena o fanua ma le eleele. O lenei la ua afa e tasi suli o le igoamatai e faaee lo latou igoamatai i se tasi o suli filifilia, o lona uiga o le matai poo le suli ua na umia, tau, faaigoa, valaau i le igoamatai, o ia lena e tausi, puipui, faapotopoto mea taua ma mea totino a le igoamatai o loo ia tauave. A faatulaga lo la va ma eleele ma fanua o le igoamatai, ona tulai mai lea o le matai o le pule faamalumalu lea I mea taua, mea totino, upu o le aiga e ona le igoamatai. **O le isi itu e tatau ona faamanino, o le a agavaa poo le tusi pasi e mafai ai ona avea ma matai e tausi le aiga. O le tali, e tasi lava le agavaa ma le tusi pasi, o le tulai lea a le <u>suli moni</u> o le igoamatai** (Le Tagaloa, 1997.p.21)

Le Tagaloa above clearly explains that the ownership, inheritance of chiefly titles and land in Samoa is that of the matai title not the person holding the title. Any person's inheritance of both land and titles is through being an heir of the family, and notably, the issue of whether one is a man or woman is not a consideration. In addition to this, the involvement of a person in decision making processes is also through heirship, we partake in all processes or ceremonies because we are heirs of families not because I am a woman or man. The discussion in Chapter Three of this thesis introduces the status of the *tamaitai*/Samoan woman within the Samoan context and broadens this discussion on the Samoan society whether it be a patrilineal or matrilineal society. Drage argued that legally and constitutionally there is the general perception that women across the Pacific have the same and equal legal rights as men to participate in politics. Wallace (2011), as discussed earlier in this thesis, disagrees with this view and suggests that matters concerning decision making in the Pacific islands are perceived to be a male domain.

One of the main factors blamed for the under-representation of women in politics in the Pacific is culture. The Pacific region is made up of three sub-groups, Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia. As I have noted, much of the research done around the issue of women in politics in the Pacific region is based on the Melanesian group. Drage's (1995) discussion above, highlights that there is considerable variation in lifestyle and that cultural practices are not the same across the three sub-groups. If there are similarities it is more that certain countries belong to the same sub-groups. The physical isolation which creates and sustains variations in life-style, in the cultures and the

everyday norms of the Pacific peoples has meant that outsiders have gained misleading perceptions of how things are done and that they make the inaccurate assumption that the norms, values and context on any issue are the same across the region (Jolly 2000, Sutherland-Haines 2010). For instance, Jolly's (2000) important discussion of the bride price in the Melanesian countries and Sutherland-Haines'(2010) argument about men determining a woman's marital partner are strong examples of traditional ceremonies that women go through in Melanesia. Eventhough these may be seen by the international community as oppressive or a violation of women's rights, such examples cannot be taken as representative of cultural practices in all Pacific island countries. The Polynesian islands, where Samoa is located, do not practice the payment of bride price nor do men determine a woman's marital partner. As my research has attempted to highlight, there is an urgent need for more detailed analyses of cultural practices in Polynesian and Micronesian islands before being able to draw any general conclusions about the under-representation of women in the Pacific region.

The ratification of most of the human rights frameworks by the Pacific region only started in 1992 (Huffer2006). As far as the protection of women's rights is concerned, twelve out of fourteen Pacific island countries have ratified the CEDAW Convention. While the move to ratify the human rights frameworks attracted wide discussion and is the subject of ongoing debates on culture versus rights (as demonstrated in the articles earlier in this chapter) such ratification is an indication of strong commitment to ensuring that the rights of women are protected in all aspects. Government reports and publications by international agencies show that much progress has been made to enhance the status of Pacific women (Huffer 2006, Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development 2014). However, despite the many efforts by the various governments and non-governmental organisations, the statistics also show that the Pacific region continues to have the lowest numbers of women in politics. Randall (1991) argues that the political under-representation of women in the Pacific is linked to their roles within society and the way in which they have been socialised, concluding that women's status and activities are primarily linked to the duties of mother and housewife (p. 43). Sutherland-Haines (2010) added that there is also debate questioning the role of traditional cultures and the way culture has evolved and modified over time. Fischer (2002), on the other hand, blamed colonisation and the introduction of

Christianity for its detrimental effect on the Pacific women, through missionary teaching on the subordinate position of women (p. 131).

In earlier chapters of this thesis, I have discussed Samoa's widely held perception that there is no gender inequality in Samoa and that women are not only viewed as equal to their male counterparts but indeed are seen to occupy higher or more prestigious status in their own families, communities and the country as a whole (Ministry of Women 2005). As Fairbairn-Dunlop (1996) explained in her book '*Tamaitai Samoa: Their Stories*' in the *faasamoa* each individual shares equal rights to resources such as land and becoming a family chief/*matai.* Yet, in the context of different waves of globalisation and where small developing island nations have to be members of multi-lateral international bodies such as the United Nations, the Samoan government has to be seen to uphold international standards. As a result, since the first United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (UNCEDAW) Samoa has been classified as one of the countries with the lowest representation of women in politics.

Samoa was the first Pacific island country to ratify the Convention on Eliminating All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1992, and since then the government of Samoa through the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development has provided five periodic reports to the United Nations CEDAW Committee. In each of the periodic reports, Samoa acknowledged its long standing commitment to the equal status of women as reflected in its laws and traditions and truthfully highlighted that of the 49 members of the Samoan parliament only four had been women in the period from ratification of CEDAW until the latest report in 2009. This raised concerns from the UNCEDAW Committee which it expressed in the concluding comments to the 32nd session (UN Women 2005, p. 5), where it made these recommendations for Samoa:

> 26. The Committee is concerned about the continuing low representation of women in public life and decision-making, including women's limited access to family chiefly titles (matai), and their resulting low representation in the Parliament. It is concerned that socio-cultural stereotypes and traditions continue to prevent women from seeking public and especially elective office.

27. The Committee encourages the State party to take sustained and proactive measures to increase the representation of women in elected and appointed bodies in all areas of political and public life. It recommends that the State party introduce temporary special measures, in accordance with article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention and the Committee's general recommendation 25, to increase the number of women in the Parliament and in local government bodies. It calls upon the State party to carry out awareness-raising campaigns on the importance of women's participation in public and political life and in decision-making positions, with a view to eliminating customs and practices that discriminate against women, in accordance with articles 2 (f) and 5 (a) of the Convention. The Committee requests the State party to regularly evaluate the impact of such measures, including temporary special measures, so as to ensure that they lead to the desired goals and to provide in its next report comprehensive information on the results achieved.

These statements clearly point to the core of the *faasamoa/*Samoan culture, the *faamatai*/chiefly system, as being the main contributing factor to the low representation of Samoan women in politics (recommendation 26). Moreover, the committee requests the Samoan government to eliminate customs and practices that discriminate against women (recommendation 27). In so doing the committee just repeats the usual view from an outside body, that the indigenous Samoan culture is unjust and inappropriate in its treatment of women. These recommendations fail to see the specific nature of oppression as it occurs through the intersectionality of race, class, and other social-identity locations pertaining to the Samoan local context. As such, they ignore the micropolitics of context, subjectivity and struggle as well as the politics of global economic and politics and political systems and processes, against the advice of Mohanty (2003a).

If these cultural practices were eliminated, what would this mean for the country and for women in Samoa? The longest serving female parliamentarian, who for a long time was the only female cabinet minister in the Samoan parliament and in the Pacific region, when interviewed for this study, stated that the low representation of Samoan women in parliament is not necessarily cultural nor does it mean that such low representation is

unique to Samoa, as the UNCEDAW Committee's recommendations imply. In her interview, she argued that Samoa doesn't need to apologise because this issue is universal:

You know it hasn't been that long ago that there were no women in other parliaments around the world. I don't think it's necessarily cultural. It's cultural in the sense that it's the practice and the perception that the area of governance is for men and the area for women is in the domestic.

If culture means a 'common social practice' so it's what the countries overseas have come through as well, then that's what we are doing. It might be coloured with elements of discrimination, but it's a global phenomenon, discrimination between the two sexes, so I don't think the faasamoa has a special case ... it's what other countries have gone through. And if you look at the countries where the women are now getting higher numbers (Rwanda has been quoted quite often now) well you look at the circumstances of Rwanda, there are hardly any men around because they all going off killing themselves, if you look at socialist countries that's the social policy that they've put in place. But if you look at sort of the more traditional, especially western... if any country is near 30% that's excellent but no one is near 50% (Participant 9, Interviewed 11.01.2013).

According to this participant, much has changed in women's representation in politics, not only throughout the world but for the Pacific region and for Samoa as well. This is a result of changes and development overtime, where more women are working and earning money and when they are earning money, they are more able to decide on what to do. Women are dominating the education sector and as they succeed academically, they are dominating the top-level positions and are becoming more open to entering a political career. This participant further stated that in discussing women's political representation, factors such as economic development and how specific societies are structured, should be considered. In the case of Samoa, where most things are structured around the family, the roles of both men and women need to be considered.

Quite apart from the human right perspectives is the practicality, and how societies are structured around families. The roles of men and women and stuff

like that, so I don't think we need to be apologists in the situation that we are in. And I do think that the early writings on women in politics through the correlation between a country's level of development and their levels of participation by women in parliament, you know if the development is good and the indicators are all there, then that will be... and if you look at it through those lenses then you could say of Samoa, of the Pacific, we are at a level of development where society is very much structured around more traditional roles in the families, where women see their main function is looking after the family. I think it's unfair because we were put into CEDAW, you know that, so people are always insisting on the human rights principles and the rights of people to do things, but you put that against the reality of people's life's and where they're at, and the priorities that people choose (Participant 9, Interviewed 11.01.2013).*

This participant's observations clearly position the low representation of women in politics as an issue not confined to a specific region, but rather as a global phenomenon. In addition, this participant looks at the situation on women's political representation across the globe and at the many factors to consider, and then highlights that progress is always a staged process. Her argument supports those of Karam (1998) and Kenworthy and Malami (1999), Corbett and Liki (2015), Baker (2014), Fraenkel (2006) and Huffer (2006) who all underline that when analysing women's under-representation in politics, it is important to acknowledge and pay attention to cultural attitudes and the individual country's social structure to enable the appropriate conclusions to be drawn.. The example of Rwanda shows a country where women are currently gaining independence and involving themselves in leadership positions, but the path to reach this result differs from country to country. It may be through unusual circumstances in that country as is the case for Rwanda or through women's empowerment by education or through exposure to foreign concepts and experience.

In the case of Samoa, the Ministry of Women claims that women have greater success rates in education and hold more high positions in government, NGOs and the private sector and that more women are taking up chiefly titles as the next step to active participation in politics (Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development. 2012). However, as I have indicated at the opening of this chapter, the findings of the

recent study by the National University of Samoa (Chan Mow *et al.* 2015) show that despite the fact that more women are becoming chiefs, there is still the problem that these women are not willing to participate actively in village council meetings. According to that study, unless these women chiefs participate in the local or village council meetings, they will not be considered for national politics. The National University of Samoa as well as the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (2014) study suggest that there is still the need for ongoing programs at all levels to encourage more women to utilise all the avenues available.

The participant quoted above also commented on the need for women to feel that they want to participate, as only then will they place importance on participating in decision making platforms such as national politics.

> *But to me and how I feel about our case, I think women have to feel that this is something that they want to do* (Participant 9, Interviewed 11.01.2013).

Part of this participant's argument does support Paunga's view (Paunga 2015)that the CEDAW obligations can be seen as one-sided and failing to acknowledge the reality and specificity of the country's cultural, economic and social context.

The advancement of women

Earlier chapters of this thesis have examined the different ways Samoan women, through their multiple roles, have contributed to framing Samoa's sustainable development. They continue to serve as producers and consumers of wealth, protectors of family lineage and cultural heritage, peace-makers and front-line ambassadors for Samoa. It is these roles that give women power and high recognition within the Samoan culture. However, this type of participation in decision making is not as easily measured as the numbers of women parliamentarians. Nor do they feature in accounts of Samoa's progress towards fulfilling its commitment to international frameworks such as CEDAW. It is arguable that in many cases these measures might be viewed under CEDAW as oppression of women's rights. A recent report by the Samoan Government, *Beijing+20, Review of Progress in Implementing the Beijing Platform for Action in Samoa*(Ministry of Women 2014), documented the many achievements in promoting

gender equality and women's empowerment at policy level, within legal and legislative frameworks, and through program implementation. Some examples of specific achievements on increasing women's political representation include: introduction of the temporary special measure for a 10% quota of women in parliament, in force from Samoa's 2016 election; community-led initiatives to increase the number of women candidates as part of a 'step-it-up' campaign; raising awareness of the value of inclusive and gender equitable governance at all levels; implementation of electoral laws to eliminate corruption and unfair practices which are a key barrier to women's candidacy (Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development. 2014).

This report also drew the attention of both national and international stakeholders to the challenges faced in this area and what the government and all its stakeholders are trying to do to overcome them. However, despite much progress made over the years by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, the government department with the responsibility for enhancing the development of women in Samoa, existing evidence and documentation shows that women continue to be marginalised in certain areas of development, and one of these areas is the participation of women in politics and public life.

The international community has called on the government of Samoa and its partners to provide a clear direction in actions and policy to ensure that services and programs are targeted to address the issue of women's low representation in politics and decision making as one factor that impacts on the quality of life for women and girls. Current reports by the Samoan government through the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (2014) highlight Samoa's commitment to enhancing gender equality at all levels. Associated actions include the Constitutional Amendment Act 2013 which introduced a 10% quota system to ensure more Samoan women enter politics (Ministry of Women 2014, p. 37). There is also the introduction of *Sui Tamaitai o Nuu*/Government Women Representatives, the female equivalent of male village mayors, in all the villages to provide a free flow of information between the Women's Committees in the villages and the government Ministry of Women. In addition, Samoa is also in the process of finalising the Samoa Gender Program, which is to increase the political participation of women as one of its deliverables. There are also many more ongoing programs outlined in the National Policy for Women(Ministry of Women

2009a and 2014). Despite the many challenges and the scarcity of resources, all the initiatives mentioned demonstrate a genuine commitment and dedication to ensuring more women take part in politics in Samoa.

Divisions and debates

Nevertheless, attitudinal barriers remain a real challenge in combating the issue of the low numbers of women in formal politics. A study by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (2014) suggests that prevailing traditional attitudinal barriers, such as village taboos which don't allow women to take chiefly titles, continue to impede women's participation in decision-making forums. In addition, the Ministry also refers to the traditional norm of the *feagaiga,* the brother and sister covenant. The findings from this report state that the traditional concept of the sacred covenant makes it inappropriate for a woman chief to sit in the village council if her brother is also a chief. As already noted, this is due to the perception that it is during these gatherings that chiefs tend to jest or employ harsh words in their speech. This perception and reservation was strongly evident in the comments by some of the study participants. The view previously cited in Chapter Five is also very relevant here as it reinforces general attitudes on the position of women in society, where men maintain the idea that a woman's position is in the home, in the private sphere.

> *It's hard, because I believe that women should not be in politics because of the brother and sister covenant. There is great emphasis in protecting the value and obligations of this relationship. The men believe that women are their feagaiga and when it comes to everyday political life there are times where language used will go overboard and that is not appropriate when their sisters are in there, while they discuss taboo issues or when they swear for instance…...So the men strongly feel that women should not be in politics* (Participant 12, Interviewed 16.01.2013).

Stevens' (2007) examination of the public and private spheres in her book *Women, Power and Politics* provides a useful explanation of this distinction. She points out that because the norms of behaviour and the institutional structures and routines of public politics refer to the interactions between people who may not know each other at all, and certainly may have no degree of intimacy between them, politics has been assumed

to occur within a sphere that was impersonal and public and separate from other parts of life, which were personal, intimate and private (p. 22). In Stevens' view, such assumptions pose problems for women. First, there is very often an elision between the notion of the private sphere and the notion of the family. Secondly, the distinction has in the past been used to support the notions that not only do women have crucial roles within the private domain but that these should be women's only roles and they should kept out of the public sphere. This view, that the public political sphere is a male-only domain, is clearly held by a number of the study participants.

One finding to be drawn from the interview data is that there is a contradiction inherent in the claims found in the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development literature and in the periodic reports to the UNCEDAW Committee where they emphasise and place high value on the *faasamoa*/Samoan culture in the Samoan governments' efforts to implement CEDAW. This obviously causes confusion and raises questions about the Samoan government's position; do they support the *faasamoa* or the concept of human rights? The UNCEDAW committee's ongoing plea for Samoa to eliminate customs and cultural practices that discriminate against women might be the reason that the Samoan government has acknowledged the issues within some of the traditional practices which disadvantage women when it comes to full participation in politics. This discussion and the many questions that it raises suggest that maybe the government of Samoa wants to give the message that both aspects, rights and culture, are of equal importance. Eventhough Samoa, in its institutional role, has an obligation to fulfil its commitments under the human rights framework of the CEDAW Convention, it does not mean that Samoa, in its role as owner of the Samoan culture, should demean that culture. This is because culture and rights are diverse and complicated concepts and, as Cowan et al.(2001) explained, a culture of rights has its own possibilities and limitations, both as a set of ideas and as a realm of practices p. 12).

During the fieldwork for this study, the twenty-one participants, men and women of different ages, of different statuses ranging from cabinet ministers, parliamentarians, chief executive officers of government ministries, government corporations and non-governmental organisations, through to church leaders, chiefs and community leaders, were asked if they viewed the low representation of women as an issue in Samoa. Five

participants strongly argued that based on their understanding of the *faasamoa* and women's status within it, they believe that the low representation of women in politics is definitely not an issue. As has been discussed in previous chapters, these five participants said that the opportunity for women is there but the decision to take it up rests on the women. In the participants' view, most women decide to prioritise their children and their families over an expensive and demanding career in politics.

> *It is because the numbers don't reflect the theory but I don't think it's an issue as the opportunity is there for all Samoans.*(Participant 17, Interviewed 23.01.2013)

Another one of these five participants shared the same belief and went on to explain that the reason why women's political representation in politics in Samoa looks like an issue is because of Samoa's obligation to report on how it has fulfilled its obligations to some of the human rights conventions using models based on purely numeric standards.

> *Regardless of my political status, I strongly believe that this is not an issue in Samoa. Samoa is one of a few cultures that acknowledge women through their participation in politics. It gives equal rights to women and men. As you are aware, Samoans have their own philosophy. However as a member of the UN we have obligations to fulfil. Sadly these obligations are outcomes of models which were based on a numerical system, and that is why Samoa seems to look bad on the world map with regards to this. That is why it seems like it is an issue but it's not.*(Participant1, Interviewed 11.12.2012)

In this participant's view, the under-representation of women in the Samoan Parliament is not considered to be an issue because the women themselves are well aware that they have the opportunity to take part if they would like to. Second, there is the understanding that whoever wins the election is a representative of the constituency, meaning that that person, whether a man or a woman, will represent the views of all people in their constituency, not just men or just women. And lastly, the participant understands her rights as a Samoan woman very well and is happy with how things are. At the end of the day she believes that it's her decision to make.

By contrast, another of these five participants referred to Samoa being a democratic nation which gives every Samoan the freedom to do anything, whether in the family, in worship or in politics. This participant cited the many women figures who have led their countries with honesty, aspiration and strength. This participant also emphasised the current trend that more women hold Chief Executive Officer positions and dominate second tier management positions, which in his opinion is a positive indicator for women in politics. He believes that soon Samoa will have more women in parliament.

> *It's not an issue and it shouldn't be an issue. Samoa is a democratic nation. It's an independent country and that means, it's a Government of the people, by the people, for the people. It means it's a government of the people. We already held a plebiscite where those who are 21 years of age were given the right to vote. This is the only country where everyone is free to do anything, there are no fences, no barriers, and even in the church there is the freedom to worship. Even in the parliament there is that freedom. Anyone can choose their own church and if time goes by and women dominate places in parliament then too bad for the men. You see the trend nowadays - most of the positions are obtained by women. At the CEO level there's an increase in the number of women holding CEO positions and women dominate the second tier management positions. Once again I emphasise, look at the trend. That really means something. That is their gateway to parliament, so it's not an issue. So what if women get to power, look at when Indira became the leader in India, Margaret Thatcher in Britain, Helen Clarke in New Zealand. It was marvellous, it's so nice, I liked their time in leadership. So why say women can't. Men might feel that it is a shame for men if women hold leadership positions, or men might worry that women might fight with words in parliament, that is the only worry. However I think this is all part of the discriminatory opinions from men and the hidden mentality of men not wanting women to take their territory.* (Participant 2, Interviewed 13.12.2012).

One of the participants referred to the fact that involvement in politics requires money and if a woman has to decide between spending money on a political career and nurturing her family, the maternal instinct will always win. As heirs of Samoan families, women have equal rights to participate fully, but the decision to do so rests with the women. At the same time this participant put across her concerns about

accepting these introduced concepts, which she calls *'foreign changes',* because they might be a threat to Samoa culture in the near future.

> *But I think there is no problem as far as participation of women in decision-making because another consideration that you have to take when you want to go for politics is MONEY. But mind you the maternal love of the woman, when there is less money, her priority is her family, then the family becomes the top priority over her political ambition. I know that is why many women don't go into politics. I don't think there is an issue there; maybe I have lived in Samoa for too long* (Participant 4, Interviewed 14.12.2012).

This participant's view highlighted one of the themes that came through strongly in the fieldwork, namely the desire to hold on to and embrace the Samoan culture. This is possibly one reason why the government of Samoa in its UNCEDAW periodic reports emphasises and keeps on acknowledging the Samoan way of life as promoting women's equality. The Samoan government firmly believes in the value of Samoan culture, and this belief is strongly supported by the study participants. It represents the view that there are different paths to women's equality. This is perhaps an example of what Mohanty(2003a) calls 'a micropolitics of context'.

> *Like what I said, my major concern is the changes promoted from the outside. I'm hoping that they will not destroy our country and our culture in a near time because Samoans have been around for how many years now and the harmony that we have, that is hardly found in other countries, is brought by our culture* (Participant 4, Interviewed 14.12.2012)

The other ten participants were less certain about this issue. Their responses reflected a high degree of ambiguity about women's political participation. On the one hand, they recognised that the low numbers of women in the Samoan parliament made the representation of women in politics a significant issue, yet on the other hand, they clearly supported the view that the opportunity for women to stand for politics is openly available.

It was an issue at first, for any change there is an issue, but because of the outstanding performance of the first woman who made it to parliament, it boosted the belief that women can make it. So it's not an issue any more.(Participant 5, Interviewed 07.01.2013)

Another one of these ten participants stated:

[I'm] not sure, but I am more towards saying it's a yes and no, but I think there should be more women. I think it should be balanced. I believe that no matter how I talk, I am not Y. Even if there is two of us men, X is not A, there is that difference and that difference is the missing factor. I value what I believe in and my own reading of the people. So there is that difference. People say that there is nothing wrong with it BUT I THINK it will be interesting if women come into politics, it will be a different dynamic altogether. Let's wait and see when women fight with words in parliament while the country is listening, if men are personally accusing other men then what guarantee women won't do the same. But then everything is like that, nothing is perfect and we should never focus on the negative. There are more positive things and women can contribute more to parliament.(Participant 6, Interviewed 08.01.2013)

This particular participant gave a modern and a very informative view on all the factors, from his status as a paramount chief who is looking after a family and serving many villages. He gave a clear explanation of the cultural context and its provision for women and from this comes his belief that women's political participation in Samoa is not an issue. As a well-known writer and an academic himself, this participant stated that the numbers don't reflect the traditional theory. However he definitely believed that there is the need for more women in the Samoan parliament.

Other participants argued that within the human rights framework, the current statistics suggest that the low representation of women in politics is an important issue. One participant supports this view but also acknowledged the value of the *faasamoa*:

Well it is in the sense that internationally there is that drive from a human rights perspective, but you will be more familiar with all the writings about all the

reasons why we should have women there: this is the democratic theory that they are 50% of the population and need representation of their interests and issues.

So you will see internationally that the women who have come in driving mostly things that are of priority interests to them which is maternal health, women's choice, they've gone for equal pay which is a fair thing, you know equal pay for equal work but once again not all countries have that… and that really in fact is a reflection of discrimination and the system of those who are more pro men.

So it's an issue because you know the Pacific is getting a sort of a bad reputation about having such a low representation.

On the other hand, well I always keep on saying that if there is a woman who wants to run but she can't run because of particular conditions then I think it is an issue but I can quite honestly say that there hasn't been a woman, you know there was the Gina Moore case but that was more from a voting perspective rather than a candidate and that was the definition of a voter and being a married voter at that. But that's a sort of a related issue but not necessarily about candidature.

I think the barrier mostly for women is a lot of women don't think it's their thing, you know. Secondly, I think women see politics as dirty and tough, they see it as expensive to run a campaign, and their priority is not to spend their resources on campaigning. Women are more practical; women would rather spend their wealth on something that they see is useful (Participant 9, Interviewed 11.01.2013).

Another participant also supported this perspective:

I think it is but the Samoan government is working on it. It's different at the moment because of our election system otherwise we should be okay.

The law is there but I think we misunderstood or misinterpreted it as a barrier. The way I see it is, it's an indication that Samoa has high respect and they assign high value to their faasamoa. So what they did, they ensured it's incorporated in our legal framework. Our forefathers ensured each individual practices it on a day to day basis. There is nothing stopping women from getting matai titles, the opportunity is there, so I think it's just a matter of getting that title to get in... (Participant 15, Interviewed 21.01.2013)

Participant nine and fifteen's perspectives on the position of women in the *faasamoa*, reveal clearly that there are diverse factors to be considered when addressing the low representation of women in societies like Samoa.

Four participants shared the belief that the current statistics are a definite indication that women's low representation in politics is an issue in Samoa.

If the numbers are not equal then I believe that it's an issue (Participant 11, Interviewed 15.01.2013).

One out of the twenty-one participants said that she was not sure whether the political representation of women in Samoa is an issue or not. This was based on her understanding and experience as a Samoan woman, where she feels honoured and held in high prestige in every facet of Samoan life. However the materials available and the actual number of Samoan women in politics really do contradict the Samoan cultural view. Nonetheless she believed that there are more important women's issues that the Samoan people should prioritise and focus attention on before representation in politics.

I think I will say like this, I am not sure. In terms of numbers I think it's issue but I have explained in my previous answers the difference and what I understand and believe in growing up as a Samoan woman, a sister/feagaiga and a wife of a paramount chief. I believe that there are more important issues that warrant the attention and priority of the Samoan people and government than women's political representation.

If you ask me why? Well because it is clear that the opportunity is there, and there is no way that we can turn around to name, blame and shame ourselves in stating that the culture is the barrier. NO, we can't because as a woman I am aware of and understand my rights as being an heir of my family. Priority should be given to the health issues women are facing, domestic violence and so forth.

There is also the argument that in the current electoral system, whoever will win in the election whether male or female, they represent the people, meaning men and women. So I'm not sure (Participant18, Interviewed 24.01.2013).

The participants for this study responded in ways that suggest that a multifaceted approach may be needed to increase women's political representation in Samoa, an approach that honours the other significant roles women play in the culture. Eventhough on most issues covered there were widely different views, all twenty-one participants share the view that women's political representation is only an issue because the numbers are not equal, not because there is a widespread groundswell of feeling of disadvantage. This means that there is a tension between a commitment to the international targets for women's participation and a defence of the *faasamoa*, due to a sense that Samoan culture is being unfairly blamed for the low numbers of women in the Samoan parliament today. Importantly, the interviews in this study reveal a perception that other significant factors that affect women's participation are being ignored, factors such as colonisation, the electoral system, the role of Christianity and women's own priorities.

Christianity has had a huge impact on the role of women in the Pacific region. This was underlined by the study participants. As discussed in Chapter Four, Christianity prioritises the role of wife and mother, and domestic responsibilities over that of the sister and her honoured cultural status. The interview data confirms the findings of the recent report by the National University of Samoa (Chan Mow *et al.* 2015) that highlights Christianity as one of the major contributing factors in the low number of women in Samoan politics. As Drage (1995) has argued, Christianity had long-term effects on power relationships and gender relations in Samoa. She points out that the Christian model of the family and the status of women generally bore little resemblance

to traditional life, and while women's status was very low in some Melanesian societies, the converse was often the case in Polynesian societies.

> Therefore Christianity liberated Pacific women from one set of customs, which in some societies oppressed women but in others gave women high status or independence, only to replace them with another set of imported customs. These emphasised a woman's primary value as a mother and wife, her primary place in the private domestic sphere, and excluded her from the public sphere of political and ritual action (Drage 1995, p 71).

The findings of this thesis support Drage's analysis. The minimal representation of women in Samoan politics is due partly to colonisation and the influence of Christianity. As Samoa went through the colonial period, the *faasamoa* adopted aspects of the colonial powers of the time, eg the formal politics as seen in national parliaments and the electoral system that Samoa now uses. These replaced the local political processes that revolved around the family system and where all family heirs were involved in the decision-making process. As indicated by the study participants, in the election process, money has manipulated and weakened the *aiga*/family system. Forty or fifty years ago, any candidate, whether a man or woman, had no doubts about family support during the election., However today family members vote for whoever gives them monetary support. As one study participant explains:

> *If you look at the current election system, naturally it needs money and I strongly believe that money has had a lot of impact on the family system. Long time ago, say 40 years back, the aiga system was very strong when it came to election. Once you know a family heir is running for the election, you and all the extended aiga support that family member. We had family members changing their voting registration from their usual residential addresses to the constituency where the family heir is running from. There were no doubts about a family member winning. Today that family support and commitment is no longer there. You have to have money, you know. Why? Because we are buying the votes.…* (Participant 5, Interviewed 07.01.2013).

Much of the current literature has failed to acknowledge that the cultural/traditional ceremonies and practices women participated in (often viewed as oppression from an outside perspective) had important cultural meaning and value to women's status in the culture (Jolly 2000). The introduction of Christianity in Samoa did not liberate Samoan women from any set of customs but rather took away some crucial aspect of their existence as Samoan women. For instance, Christianity's emphasis on the primary role of the woman as the mother and wife diminishes the status of the Samoan woman as the sister/covenant/f*eagaiga* and because Christian activities were dominant and were adopted as part of Samoa's everyday life, many generations of women have grown up thinking that this is who they are and how things should be. From another participant:

> *Christianity played a crucial role in our lives, it categorised the do's and the don'ts especially for us women and we grew up with it. Somewhere along the line, I thought that this is how life is, that my position is in the home, that I am always second, that during ceremonial activities I always have to cook, clean and eat last. At times, I kept telling myself that Christianity brainwashed who we truly are and where we should be in society. So in all the decisions we were conditioned to think that men were always superior to us, and that women should always come last. Why? Because it is what we learnt about every Sunday right from childhood* (Participant 4, Interviewed04.01.2013).

This powerful observation is backed up by Sutherland (2010) who contends that there is no doubt that this replacement and the shift in status and roles makes women more subordinate to their husbands and encourages them to prioritise their family needs over a political career.

Government versus non-government organisations

It would be a mistake to assume that the under-representation of women in politics means that women are not politically active in Samoa. Samoa's history has shown that women held high positions and were warriors in the past. There is a great deal of activity in government, non-government and community initiated projects to raise women's awareness of the importance of getting actively involved in politics. Samoan women would find it difficult to see the national election results as a complete portrait

of women's action and success in the political arena. Other areas of women's political activity in Samoa need to be examined. In the literature review I referred to some of the discussion on women's political representation, where Wallace (2011), in her work in the Melanesian region, concluded that promoting gender equality with a particular focus on women's political representation is one-sided in that it is mostly done by non-government organisations. Wallace contrasts this with a lack of genuine commitment from government. This highlights the reality and challenges faced by gender equality initiatives in the Pacific region. It is generally understood that advocating for gender equality, not just within the political sphere but in all spheres of life, is a real challenge. For Samoa there is a widespread assumption that the notion of women's rights is a foreign concept and that raising awareness of gender equality means women are trying to change the structure of society. As discussed, the perception is that by enhancing women's rights, irrevocable damage will be done to the *faasamoa*. This makes the task of changing people's views even more challenging for development partners, human rights activists and community development workers. Similarly, non-government development workers feel that there is always the challenge of limited resources and that when resources are limited then there is often the name and blame game. One of the participants illustrated this by stating:

> *I think the reality of development work in Samoa and I suppose throughout the Pacific region is a real challenge. I have worked in the field for almost all my life and I'm very passionate about it. The experience is raising the awareness on gender equality, not just within politics but in all spheres of life. It is a struggle, a real challenge. The main challenge that I have to deal with is the stigma and the perception of people towards the empowerment of women. Men think or believe that we women are trying to change how society is structured, we women want to overpower the world or women want to compete with them. It is even harder when women themselves believe that they are okay where they are, and I don't blame them. Not only that, but the reality is, we don't have enough resources to do as much as we would like to do so there is still a lot to do in the area of gender equality.*

> *Not only that but there is the challenge of us development workers not being able to work together, and in my experience once the pressure of meeting targets*

or achieving outcomes sinks in, then we turn around, name and blame the others, I guess that is why most of our efforts don't sustain. (Participant 3, Interviewed 12.12.2012)

The Samoan government, in its many reports on women's empowerment and gender equality, acknowledges the continuous support and partnership efforts between the government of Samoa, non-government organisations and the international community aimed at empowering women in Samoa. To this end there are many networks - the CEDAW Partnership Committee, the Community Sector Committee, and the National Council of Women to mention a few. These bodies are made up of representatives from all the government Ministries and Corporations, non-government organisations, faith-based organisations and community leaders. According to the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (2014), the many achievements for the advancement of women, particularly in women's political representation today, are evidence of collaborative efforts with all the stakeholders working hand in hand - women at the grassroots level, non-governmental organisations, different government Ministries using funding provided by the international community. Interestingly, the views gathered from the fieldwork component of this study show a rather different scenario. Ten of the twenty-one participants, based on their experiences of having worked with both government and non-government organisations to enhance the development of women, believed that the low representation of women in politics is now an issue and will be an issue in Samoa into the future because there are difficulties between the implementing agencies and other stakeholders. The work of Wallace (2011), discussed throughout this study, talks about promoting gender equality in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands by using the metaphor 'Paddling the Canoe on One Side'. This indicates the frustrations resulting from a situation that is one-sided, lacking in balance and cooperation, thus leading to a failure to move forward. Six of the interviewees stated, based on their experience working in non-government organisations, that the metaphor 'Paddling the Canoe on One Side' illustrates the reality of implementing and promoting gender equality in the Samoan context, that there is an imbalanced relationship between government and non-government organisations when it comes to promoting gender equality. For example, one of the study participants believes that the government should take the lead in promoting gender equality, but she

feels that over the years there has been no genuine commitment from the government of Samoa.

> *I will comment from my experience as a senior government official for many years, in fact, I was Head of the programs division of the Ministry of Women for many years. I would say that if there is any one partner to take the lead in all the developments on gender equality, it has to be the government of Samoa through the Ministry of Women. WHY? Because this is their baby. But the reality is, throughout my years being with the Ministry, I felt that the commitment by the government was and is still lacking. If you look at the various reports, starting from the Strategy for the Development of Samoa, the National Policy for Women and the other reports, you would see Samoa declared its commitment to fulfilling gender equity/equality. The reality is, I firmly believe, that this is only per se, why? Because if you look at the budget allocation for women's advancement, I would say it's only a quarter of a lolly. So we have always depended on aid money to implement the many works we did in the past. That is why we didn't have any lasting effects. So if you ask me about the programs, I would say that they are not effective because there are no lasting outcomes* (Participant1, Interviewed 11.12.2012).

This particular participant went on to argue that the lack of real sustained effort from the government to increase the number of women in politics is no different to using a bouquet of flowers for house decoration. In her opinion, all the current efforts by the government are just simply ticking the boxes so that the government looks good in the eyes of the international community. This participant's frustration not only reflects the complex reality of promoting gender equality but also supports Krook and Child's (2010), and Paxton and Hughes' (2015) views that promoting gender equality in some countries, especially in developing countries, comes with huge expectations. When a government is particularly subject to international pressure, it is forced to increase their dependence on foreign aid to implement national measures for gender equality. This supports the argument that factors such as the economic capacity of a nation should also be considered when analysing the factors that contribute to the low representation of women in the Samoan parliament.

Another participant supported the view of the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development by stating that all the achievements today in enhancing Samoan women's political participation have only come about through the strong dedication and commitment and collaborative efforts of both the government of Samoa and its partners, non-government organisations like Mapusaga o Aiga (Family Haven), Samoa Victim Support Group (SVSG), Women in Leadership Advocacy Group (WinLA), faith-based organisations, community leaders and the international community.

> *The reality of working in this area is very challenging and the only way we can see lasting and sustainable results is through strong and effective collaborative and close networking. If you are to compare the achievements on women's political representation in Samoa with the other Pacific countries, you would agree with me that Samoa is well in advance of its neighbouring countries. This is because all the stakeholders are working together* (Participant 2, Interviewed 13.12.2012).

On the other hand, other participants felt that the hard work by the non-government organisations is not sufficiently acknowledged. According to these participants, most of the work done at the grassroots level to increase the number of women in politics is conducted by non-government organisations, with very little acknowledgement or recognition from the government. One participant shared her disappointment about how things are conducted at present:

> *In the past there was very few programs and then we, the NGO, conducted some initiatives, for instance we created the INAILAU network which concentrated on pushing women to contest in elections and raised their awareness of how important it is for women to participate in decision making at all levels. However, it didn't sustain because of some problems.*

> *But going back to the question, let me say that I'm very disappointed with how things are. Why? Because I think we, the non-government organisations, are doing the dirty work yet government receives credit. However when it comes to real and lasting commitment, nothing. It's all talk. Look at the 10% quota and*

how it happened. The government never consulted us. We just heard that an amendment is being tabled in Parliament, that was it and it was then that we acted. But it was too late, they have already decided…….When I first heard of the 10% quota, I was so excited at first, I said this is fantastic, this is a temporary special measure that should go a long way it's like a kick start. However I thought more about it again, and I thought to myself, this is not good for women, not really, it's like another little lolly hand out from the government. And aren't we great? Samoa is on the world news: we are giving temporary 10%, why only 10% why not 30% at least. The government is just adding more reasons for women to be mocked and to be talked about in parliament (Participant3, Interviewed 12.12.2012).

It is clear in these comments that there are issues, not only with the introduction of a quota for women in Samoa but also in how it was introduced. Samoa is one of two countries in the Pacific region which has introduced a quota system in an effort to encourage more women to participate in politics. Five of the study participants supported the idea of the quota system, stating that it is a start: it will help knock down the barriers to women entering parliament and open up opportunities for women. However, fifteen participants, most of them women, thought that women in the reserved seats would be stigmatised as gap fillers/*faatumupu*. They strongly argued that women don't need any more reasons to be stigmatised in parliament and only when they have competed during an election, will they have real equality.

In contrast to participant three's view, another of the participants argued that in anything there is always an opposite side. Working on promoting gender equality is the same as the set-up of formal politics, where there is the ruling party (government) and an opposition. The reality is, no matter how hard the government tries, there will always be negativity from the opposition. According to this participant this is exactly what's happening in this case:

I strongly believe that there are no issues and the government through its mandated agency (Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development) is following procedure by involving and acknowledging all the partners, having all of them on board. However at times when I hear the non-government

organisations complaining, I feel very sad. Most times, I feel that they are just barking and making noise without evident thinking. This is because I am sure there is a reason behind every decision or action and the government is not blind. I think what we should do is to stop the name and shame/name and blame game and start working together as it is the only way to survive.

Sometimes, I am saddened, because at the end of the day, its women fighting amongst themselves: who's doing the work and who's not. This has to change, because I don't think the programs conducted to increase the number of women in politics are having any effect. It's very adhoc based. We only do it when there is some sort of funding and when the election is nearer. I think Samoa needs to start working together (Participant 12, Interviewed 16.1.2013)

The other seven participants had no hesitation in supporting the view that Samoa is well ahead in its work to empower women when compared to other Pacific countries. They believed that this is evidence that all the stakeholders are working together.

As a government Ministry employee, and an employee who is working towards all these issues, I believe that they are effective. A lot more women are now sitting in village councils, the government now has the equivalent of the village mayors, which is something that was not there in the past. There are now women village mayors, 5 of them, in the past there was none. How did this happen? Collaborative efforts and strong networking relationship between the government and all its stakeholders. (Participant18, Interviewed 24.01.2013)

Three of the study participants were not aware of any programs, government or non-government, that were tackling the problem. They stressed that their only knowledge is through the news on the radio, television and newspapers. In their view, if Samoa is serious about having more women in politics, then the government and its partners should be more visible at the community level.

To be honest, I don't know any programs. I have never participated in any program. The only information that I know about this is from the news on radio, television and

newspaper. I think the government and its partners should conduct more programs in the village level (Participant 20, Interviewed 30.01.2013).

In addition, three participants also believed that leadership in the lives of Samoan women does not fit neatly into one category because there are still only a few women who are leaders in local government and businesses. They firmly believed that leadership begins at an early age and continues to be expressed across many areas of their lives, for example within the extended family or in the church. These spaces and women's roles within them need to be considered when the government and its stakeholders are planning initiatives to support women leaders.

The views discussed above reaffirm the general proposition that promoting gender equality in all spheres of life is a complex challenge. It is challenging in the sense that there is not a single view but rather a multi-faceted perception, not only from men but from women themselves. This is then combined with the significant challenge of scarcity of resources, especially for a developing country like Samoa. The interview data has highlighted some of the main problems in development work - the naming and blaming game, for instance, when dealing with the pressure of trying to fulfil obligations with limited resources, dealing with partnership or internal issues, as well as the assumption from some partners, especially non-government organisations, that once government commits to something, then there should be direct action immediately.

As already indicated, external research and international targets blame culture, especially, in the case of Samoa, the village system or the chiefly system, as the reason for the low participation of women in formal politics. However there is little evidence of programs focused on this. Women's active participation in local level politics should be fostered, as this chapter has suggested, since this will generate a greater level of acceptance for women as potential parliamentarians. It is also important to note that government, non-government organisations and the international community often fail to realise that achieving gender equality, whether in decision-making positions or other areas, is a long, staged journey which will require true collaboration and the ability to realise, acknowledge and build on the strengths of the Samoan cultural context. The data collected from the participants in this study backs up the findings in some of the current literature, and shows that there is a diversity of opinion on the factors that

contribute to the low representation of women. It throws some light on the factors constraining women's participation - women choosing family over politics, the electoral system, economic factors, limitations of international targets for women's participation, the effects of colonialism, as well as the continuing impact of Christianity. More sustainable programs across all sectors need to be developed with a specific focus on the village or local level, in order to encourage women to take up politics and to be more involved in formal political decision making.

CONCLUSION

The question of the under-representation of women in all levels of decision making and in particular in parliamentary politics has been contested and debated all over the world. Most of the literature evaluated and discussed throughout this thesis was based around two main themes: first, that there are low numbers of women in politics, as shown by statistical analyses (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016), noting that this issue does not pertain to Samoa alone; and second, that colonisation, economic factors, traditional attitudes, culture, socio-economic development, geographical location and the political system adopted by a country are all factors that contribute to the level of women's participation in decision making.

The preceding chapters in this thesis all confirm the finding by Beckfield, Viterna and Fallon (2008), that the models designed to measure and account for the low representation of women in developing societies are based on the context of European and developed countries. The authors highlight the need to develop or design a new, more suitable theoretical model that would better fit the interests of a developing country. In the case of a small South Pacific island state, such as Samoa, current theoretical models are inadequate to measure the political participation of women and they risk ignoring the positive role of traditional culture in enhancing women's status. This thesis, as the first detailed qualitative study of women's political representation in Samoa, has highlighted some of the complexities involved in discussing women's participation and their roles in the political sphere in Samoa. This is made even more complex because Samoa is a country that believes women and men are equal and where women traditionally have an honoured status as the *feagaiga*/sister. This thesis has argued for the need to understand the concepts of *feagaiga* and *tamasa* in order to better contextualise the Samoan ideology that there is no gender inequality and that in Samoa, women have the same rights as their male counterparts to participate politically.

The thesis has also argued that it is not sufficient to claim, as other authors and international bodies have done, that indigenous cultural factors are the cause for the low representation of women in parliament, First, the culture has been impacted by colonisation and Christianity, economic change and increasing rates of higher

education. In many ways, as expressed in the interviews and the fieldwork participant observation, the values and beliefs that enhance the role of women in Samoa have been shaped by the impact of outside factors. Christianity for example, downplayed the status of the Samoan woman as the *feagaiga*/sister and the *tamasa*/sacred child but promoted the role of woman as mother and dutiful wife. This role confined women to the private sphere and diminished their cultural roles in the public sphere. The conversion to Christianity had drastic influence not only on the society itself but also on Samoan women and on their position in society.

Second, the issue of women's participation in parliament is a multi-faceted problem. Following Mohanty's suggestion to pay attention to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity and struggle as well as the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes, this thesis has attempted to provide a detailed account of Samoan cultural beliefs and practices relating to women as well as to consider the international and national context that affects governments and non-government organisations involved in policy development for women.

From the primary and secondary research, this study concludes that a way forward would be for stronger recognition and harnessing of women's active participation in local level politics in Samoa in order to generate a greater level of acceptance of women's political participation at the national and international level. It is also important to note that government, non-government organisations and the international community often overlook the fact that achieving gender equality, whether in decision-making positions or in other areas, requires time and genuine collaboration, not just establishing universal goals and targets. The interview responses in this study clearly show how strong cultural beliefs are about the equality of women in Samoa. Both men and women have equal rights to family resources including rights to land and the right to become a family chief (*matai*).This thesis speaks to a culture that acknowledges and embraces women to participate equally with their male counterparts in politics.This means that the ground is already laid for these rights to become a reality. Samoan women were warriors in the past, and over time, through a process of collaboration and cultural respect will become parliamentarians in the future with a commitment to their families and to Samoan culture. Samoans summarise the many strengths of their women thus: *'O tamaitai Samoa o feagaiga tausi, O tamasa, O toala fanau e faaauauina nafa o*

aiga, O pae ma auli, O ioimata o tamatane', 'Samoan women are pearls and most precious diamonds in the brother and sister covenant relationship, sacred children, they are the womb that bears heirs and sustains family lineages, the redeemers and peacemakers'. All these strengths are brought together in the Samoan saying *'E au le inailau a tamaitai',* 'Women can do anything'.

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APPENDIX: 1

<u>**INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**</u>:

Project Title: Women in Decision Making in Samoa.
Study Conducted: Victoria University: Melbourne Australia
Research Conducted: Samoan PHD Student: Mema Motusaga

1. In your opinion do you think men and women are equal in Samoa? If Yes explain and if NO please elaborate?

2. What is your opinion on some of the reasons why there is not many women in leadership positions and in parliament?

3. In your understanding of the faasamoa; are women part of decision making processes? If Yes explain and if NO please give examples?

4. There is a Samoan saying: "E au le inailau a tamaitai" (translated as women can do better than their male counterparts and are high achievers compared to their brothers). What is your understanding of that metaphor and how does it relate to "Women in decision making"?

Family:
5. Can you explain the women's roles in the family? And in your opinion are those roles acknowledged within society? If Yes please give examples and if NO why?

6. In your opinion should women be given chiefly titles in their families? If YES explain and if NO why Not?

7. What role does the family play in promoting women's participation in political decision making?

Church:
8. What is your understanding of women's role in the church?

9. In your opinion do you know if women are part of church decision making processes? If Yes give examples if NO explain why Not?

10. What is your understanding of the saying "E au le inailau a tamaitai with regards to the issue of women ordination in the church?

11. What role does the church play in women's participation in political decision making?

Chiefly System:
12. In your opinion what might have been the reasons of the few women holding chiefly titles?

13. In your opinion what role does women play in the chiefly system?

14. What is your understanding of the chiefly system's role in promoting women's participation in political decision making?

Political Processes.
15. In your opinion Is women's representation in parliament an issue in Samoa? If Yes explain and if No why Not?

16. What is your understanding of the effectiveness of the programs in place to counter the issue? Please give examples.

17. If you were to decide should there be more women in parliament and in leadership position? If YES, Why and if No why not?

18. What are some of your thoughts on women's role in parliament should be? Please give examples/In your opinion what would be one significance of having more women in parliament and in leadership positions?

Optional: for Women who are in leadership position
In your own words can you comment on how you become a parliamentarian? Was it easy for you to obtain a leadership position? Please share your experience.

Thank You for making time to participate in this study. Your responses will be acknowledged in the final product of this project. God Bless You All.