

Hard times in Apia? Urban landlessness and the church in Samoa

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This paper presents findings from a study about the relationships between social change and settlement change in Samoa, where a form of landlessness is emerging in low income areas of the main town, Apia. It examines changing reciprocal kinship arrangements with respect to customary rural village plantation land and changes in both individual and household relationships with the church. Although these relationships are typically closely bound in Pacific island societies, recent field-based research has revealed the expansion of landless urban settlements with households that are alienated from rural village-based kin and, by extension, customary land.

Keywords: church, landlessness, Samoa, poverty, urban growth

Introduction

In many Pacific Island countries (PICs), kinship and Christianity traditionally form the foundation for all political, economic and social organization and are inextricably linked. Kinship and social networks involve a reciprocal system of gift-giving, where material and financial support are exchanged, shared and redistributed. However, increasing hardship in PICs are seemingly having a profound effect on kinship relations at the village level, which might be providing the impetus for some households to relocate from rural village to 'urban village' settlements. In the case of Samoa, where Apia is the capital city and the country's only economic and commercial hub, the city is often described as a collection of urban villages, due to its influence on villages that surround the original Apia town settlement (Storey, 2003; Thornton *et al.*, 2010). Such a transition, from rural to urban village settlements, can result in the alienation of urban-based households from the reciprocal social and economic benefits of traditional relations with the *aiga* – the extended family – in the rural villages.

Social change in PICs has been discussed in various contexts that include linkages to climate change (Barnett & Campbell, 2010), religious change (MacPherson & MacPherson 2009; 2011; Thornton *et al.*, 2010) and urban poverty (Chand & Yala, 2008; Thornton, 2009; Jones, 2012a; 2012b; Prasad & Mohanty, 2013). In the context of Samoa, a small island developing state in the South Pacific, social relationships and traditional obligation have been explored as factors influencing land redistribution and revocation of land rights due to dissension among rural village members (Tiffany, 1975; 1980; Tiffany & Tiffany, 1978). Ward (1959; 2005) was concerned about change in human settlement patterns as indicative of wider social change in Samoa. These issues were explored in a recent study (Thornton *et al.*, 2010), which examined the effects of kinship and church obligations on increasing poverty and speculated on the possibility of increasing landlessness among urban-based Samoans. Thornton *et al.* (2010) found that people are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the financial burden incurred

from membership of traditional or mainline Christian denominations (Congregational, Catholic and Methodist), and are changing to 'new' denominations deemed to be 'churches of the poor' (Mormon, Assembly of God, Seventh Day Adventist). Macpherson and Macpherson (2009; 2011) have also commented on the social and economic shifts in church membership and the implications for traditional village and national development.

In Samoa, where the *matai* (chiefs) hold significant influence over decisions regarding rural village-church membership, households opting to change denominations may face alienation from the *aiga* and, in some instances, may risk expulsion from the rural village (Tiffany, 1975; 1980; Macpherson & Macpherson, 2011). This alienation can result in the loss of kinship benefits that include access to traditional lands, which can have serious implications for household food security. In the Thornton *et al.* (2010) study, interview respondents, particularly *matai* and village pastors, acknowledged the steady migration of rural village residents to Apia, with many entering into leaseholds and not maintaining kinship ties. The implication of reduced links with rural-based kin is exclusion from customary land use. In this article, household questionnaire survey data will be used to explore the issue of landless Samoans. Qualitative data drawn from field-based research will also be used to place the quantitative household data on landlessness into the wider context of changing settlement patterns as a reflection of broader social change.

When considering relationships between settlement patterns and social change in Samoa, one trend that is increasingly apparent is the emergence of a settlement class that is rather untypical of Samoa and much more typical of developing countries elsewhere. Perhaps the most significant indicator of social change in Samoa is the loss of customary or familial land and the decline of traditional kin-based relationships. This paper seeks to understand two important questions, first, to what extent are settlement areas in greater Apia characterized by a new landless class in Samoan society? Secondly, are some urban households opting out of contribution to the rural *aiga* and its church, and turning to urban-based faith groups?

Whereas this study is primarily concerned with the customary land system, and changing familial and church relationships in Samoa, an overview of increasing urban poverty in Pacific island countries will help in establishing the context of settlement patterns and increasing landlessness, which is a focus of this paper. A discussion of land tenure and land redistribution will be followed by consideration of results from a household survey among urban villages in the Apia area. A final section will conclude this study's analysis of change in settlements and church and kinship relationships as they affect the redistribution of customary lands. Ultimately, this paper will argue that urban-based Samoans who opted out of reciprocal kinship and redistribution systems, and depend on informal land tenure arrangements through urban-based church membership, may find it difficult to exercise their customary rights to traditional land in the event that their situation changes. It is these Samoan individuals and households that are effectively landless.

Urban poverty in the Pacific

Urbanization in developing regions is expected to follow the global trend of increasing urban population growth (ADB, 2012). Available literature on urbanization in PICs discusses increasing unemployment, crime and the growth of squatter (illegal) and slum (informal) settlements (Walsh, 1982; Thornton, 2009; Connell, 2011; Jones, 2012a;

2012b; ADB, 2012). The urban population in small developing PICs has reached 40 per cent, and the growth trend is expected to continue (World Bank, 2005; Jones, 2012a; 2012b). Urban poverty and growth in squatter and slum settlements are recognized facts, which pose significant challenges for social and economic development (Thornton, 2009; Jones, 2012a; 2012b). In a recent Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2012) report, it is estimated that 800 000 to 1 million Melanesian urban residents live in squatter settlements. These settlements largely exist in the former colonial port towns, now capital cities, in Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea), Suva (Fiji), Honiara (Solomon Islands) and Port Vila (Vanuatu) and account for 15–50 per cent of the total urban population (ADB, 2012). The reasons behind rural to urban migration in PICs reflect the situation in other developing countries, for example, expectations of a better quality of life, employment, improved education and access to health facilities. Specifically, PICs lack the resources to cope with demands for housing, sanitation and job creation that occur as a result of rapid urbanization. PICs are experiencing increasing urban densities, particularly in the larger islands of Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, where living conditions for the urban poor reflect conditions typically found in other developing countries (Bryant-Tokelau, 1995; Thornton, 2009; Connell, 2011; ADB, 2012). Jones (2012b: 335) asserts, ‘in the next 15 years, squatter and informal settlements will comprise the main urban form in Pacific towns and cities’. Although squatter settlements at levels experienced in the Melanesian context do not yet exist in Samoa, an urbanizing trend does indeed exist and related urban poverty is increasing.

Land tenure and redistribution in Samoa

Upon achieving constitutional independence in 1962, Samoans ensured that the role of kinship and the authority of the *matai* in local and national government were retained in the constitution (Macpherson, 1999). At the village level, the *matai* make decisions regarding the collection, allocation and division of resources for the *aiga*, which includes land allocation. Although a *matai* may exercise *pule* (power), it is the *aiga* that bestows *pule* to the *matai*. These intertwining relationships have significant implications for the use of land and ‘other family property’ that come under the jurisdiction of family *matai* who ensure that the ‘village estate and welfare’ are looked after (Huffer & So’o, 2005: 320).

The issue of landless families and individuals, although not a new issue (Johnston, 1953; Ward & Kingdon, 1995), has recently been raised as a growing concern in both the Samoan National Human Development Report (SNHDR) (National University of Samoa, 2006) and the census of population and housing (Government of Samoa, 2001). Presently, the landlessness phenomenon in urban Samoa and its possible relationship to financial obligations of kinship are not clear. All persons with Samoan ancestry have, at least theoretically, entitlement to share land belonging to their *aiga* through patrilineal or matrilineal connections. However, recognition of such ties depends on co-residence and service to the family, the *matai* and the village. Those who move away and do not maintain the ties for themselves and their children may become effectively landless. Although the notion of landless Samoans appears contradictory, given the nature of customary land ownership in the country, interview respondents often raised the issue in connection with a severing of ties between urbanized Samoans and their rural kin (Thornton *et al.*, 2010). In addition to the 2006 SNHDR and 2001 census documents, respondents claimed that among the most vulnerable households are urban villagers

without land. Increasing landless individuals and households have been identified as those most affected by hardship, which is a 'new public concern' and 'less recognized than before' (Muagututi'a, 2006: 58). The research discussed in this article will attempt to improve our understanding of landlessness in Samoa.

Academics familiar with Samoan society have noted significant changes in settlement patterns and village organization (Macpherson & Macpherson, 2009; 2011). In his contextual analysis of these changes, Ward (2005: 117), for example, has suggested that a detailed understanding of changes in settlement as signals or markers of changes within Samoan society itself, is overdue. The more recent study by Thornton *et al.* (2010) attempted to explore social change through church and kinship relationships, which is essentially a discussion of the *faaSamoa* (the Samoan way of life). Familial reciprocal exchanges among the *aiga* and the church form the foundation of Samoan society – the two are inseparable. External change or influences precipitated by globalization, such as fluctuations in the prices of food and oil, can impact upon important decisions at the household level, particularly in terms of resource allocation. These decisions can often involve difficult choices, with implications for the continuation of traditional ways of life.

Who are the landless?

Although Thornton *et al.* (2010) indicated that fraying kinship ties are closely linked to a shift among low income groups to new or non-traditional churches, results from a recent quantitative household survey suggest that landless groups are more likely to withdraw from reciprocal kinship relationships than seek alternate church membership. In the Samoan context, this finding represents a significant outcome of the field-based research. However, further results presented in this paper will hopefully lead to an improved understanding of new settlement areas in greater Apia, and the extent to which they are home to a new landless class in Samoan society. These issues are important, since numerous references to 'landless' Samoans were found in the key 2001 census of population and housing report (Government of Samoa, 2001), but the report offered no clear explanation of what it actually meant to be 'landless' in Samoa (Government of Samoa, 2001: 31; Muagututi'a, 2006: 58, 62, 63). In the broader literature on land use, privatization of land and issuance of land titles in the so-called global South, there is concern about short-sighted policy prescriptions that ignore local variables, such as social networks (Bromley, 2009) and arrangements that can serve as *de facto* tenure (Chand & Yala, 2008; van Gelder, 2010). This paper emphasizes the importance of customary land tenure and alternate arrangements for household land use that do not include private ownership. For low income households in Samoa, both informal and alternate *de facto* tenure through social networks, such as church membership, can be effective in providing households with some measure of security against increasing hardship caused by internal (i.e. kinship) and external pressures (i.e. globalization, westernization and urbanization).

Urban growth, land and the church in Samoa

Samoa's population is 182 000 (2008 estimate), of which 99 per cent identify themselves as Samoan (Muagututi'a, 2006). Apart from very small numbers on other islands, Samoa's population is unequally divided between the two largest islands of Upolu (76 per cent) and Savai'i (24 per cent) (Figure 1). The capital city, Apia, is located on Upolu Island, with an estimated population of over 40 000 in 2008. In the period between

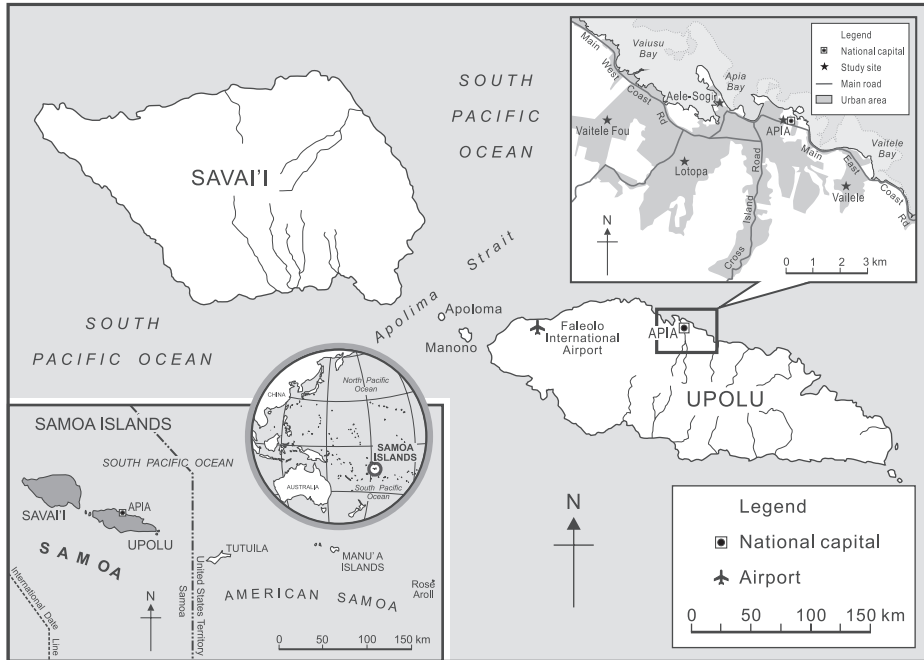


Figure 1. Map of Samoa. Adapted from *The World Factbook*.

1991 and 2001, there was a 35 per cent population increase in the area known as Northwest Upolu (NWU), which has been attributed largely to Samoans seeking private ownership of previously state-owned plantation lands. The rural-urban population flows stem mainly from Savai'i, the larger of the two islands, which is characterized by its more traditional, subsistence-based rural economy.

On Upolu, 52 per cent of the population live in the Apia Urban Area (AUA) and NWU, in what will be referred to here as greater Apia. Population increase has led to the growth of new settlements along a significant corridor, which now extends from Apia to the Faleolo International Airport in NWU. This peri-urban corridor includes many new settlements that are located on previously state-owned land, overseen by a statutory corporation formerly known as the Western Samoa Trust Estate Corporation (WSTEC). In the 1990s, designated WSTEC land (post-1996, STEC or Samoa Trusts Estate Corporation) comprised largely of coconut plantations created during Samoa's experience with German colonialism, and was the target of a government initiated land grab for economic growth and job creation. The government initially sought to encourage commercial farming on these lands, but a lack of interest in commercial farming led to the decision to subdivide the WSTEC lands into ¼ acre housing plots. These subdivisions became very popular for those seeking freehold land ownership, particularly for untitled Samoans seeking freehold land ownership, which is independent from the influence of the *matai* in terms of land resource allocation.

The flow of rural migrants to greater Apia reflects certain push-pull factors that are also symptomatic of urbanization elsewhere in the Pacific Region, namely improved employment opportunities, education and healthcare (ADB, 2012). For the youth, pull factors might include the lure of a so-called modern urban lifestyle. Where church-run schools are located in the urban area, some households have relocated to greater Apia

to be closer to their children. However, concerns about increasing pockets of poverty and income inequality in Apia are reflected in the spread of sub-standard housing and increasing 'suburban dystopia', with a growing frequency of reports about youth crime and domestic violence, which are generally attributed to restlessness, fragmentation of kinship and decline in membership of Samoa's mainline or traditional church denominations (Thornton *et al.*, 2010).

The external view of Samoan society is typically one of harmonious and self-supporting kinship structures and stable governance at both village and national levels. Compared with many small island developing states, both inside and outside the region, the persistence of this view is understandable, though debatable. However, the reality of urban poverty and urbanization in modern Samoan society reflects the general trend experienced in other PICs (ADB, 2012; Thornton, 2009). Although comparatively small in scale, issues of urban poverty in Samoa are undoubtedly increasing (Jones & Cocks, 2003; Food and Agricultural Organization, 2006). Results from the 2002 Household, Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) (Government of Samoa, 2002) indicated that 20 per cent of Samoan households were living below the basic needs poverty line, defined as the ability of households to meet the following requirements: food, housing, clothing, schooling, church contributions and cultural obligations (Muagututi'a, 2006: 62). It has been suggested that these households are 'experiencing some degree of financial hardship on a daily or weekly basis' (Salele, 2006: 110). When the original registered owner of a freehold or leasehold dies intestate, as is often the case, the children and grandchildren inherit the land. This situation can complicate the allocation and use of familial lands.

Burden of tradition

For households earning below the basic needs line (less than USD1 per day), ongoing cultural and church obligations are a growing concern as major contributors to both hardship and a destabilizing strain on household budgets. Both the 1997 and 2002 HIES indicated that church contributions have become particularly competitive and burdensome, and the failure of households to meet material expectations has been met with 'punishments meted out by Village Councils . . . [that are] . . . often harsh and financially expensive' (Muagututi'a, 2006: 62), and which can sometimes result in expulsion from a village. According to the 1997 HIES, over the course of one year, households contributed over WST5.7 million (USD2.5 million) per annum in church contributions, and WST34.8 million per annum on *fa'alavelave* or cultural obligations (e.g. weddings, funerals and title bestowals).¹ Overall, contributions for familial and church purposes are WST52 million per annum (Government of Samoa, 2002).

Population expansion in Upolu, especially in the Apia urban area, has brought other pressures, including health and environmental problems, as well as sub-standard living conditions. Moreover, urban households, such as in non-traditional villages like Vaitele, often live without the traditional support structures typically provided for by the village community. Notably absent from research on Samoan poverty is a focus on the emergence of sub-standard settlement growth in Apia. The remainder of this paper will focus on the sociocultural drivers behind low income settlements and landlessness.

Methodology

This article draws upon data from a household questionnaire survey, which was administered by the authors in an attempt to provide insight into the nature and likely factors

behind landlessness in Samoa's only urban centre, Apia. A random cluster sampling method was used to select 292 households in low income communities throughout greater Apia. Greater Apia is largely a patchwork collection of urban villages, where its residents seek formal employment and are increasingly independent from the reciprocal and remittance-based economy, which is predominantly found in the rural areas. These urban households are located in Sogi and Aele (n=30), Apia (n=50), Vailele (n=60), Lotopa (n=102) and Vaitele Fou (n=50).² Sogi and Aele, although historically two distinct villages, are locally regarded as one large urban village on customary land, hence the combined number. Apia consists of customary, government freehold and leasehold land without any evident or logical demarcations.

For a range of reasons, the government has thus far resisted establishing a municipal authority, and as such, there have been efforts to treat villages, neighbourhoods and settlements as urban villages (Storey, 2003). The term 'urban' in this context reflects the nature of the varying village types, which have become dependent on Apia for employment and a lifestyle that is less traditional than in the more rural parts of the country. The terms 'urban village' and 'rural village' are used here when discussing settlement locations. Various members of the church, civil society and village *matai* were interviewed in 2010 (Thornton *et al.*, 2010). These interviews are summarized below to provide context to the questionnaire survey results discussed in later sections. They also offer an invaluable insight into the dynamics of traditional kinship relationships in contemporary Samoa, as these affect household decision making, rural-urban drift and village governance arrangements.

The qualitative and quantitative survey results reveal complex economic and land use relationships between households and the three mainline Christian churches (Congregational, Methodist and Catholic), and various 'new' denominations (e.g. Assembly of God, Mormon/Latter Day Saints – LDS). Although new denominations have emerged in Samoa as 'the church of the poor' (Thornton *et al.*, 2010), many respondents in this study have maintained their membership of an urban mainline church group and have chosen to sever ties with their rural village-based *aiga* and rural mainline church. This paper will adopt the terminology 'poor households' used in the SNHDR (National University of Samoa, 2006), meaning those earning incomes below the essential basic needs line of WST5.36 per day (or USD2.20). The essential basic needs line differs from the widely used term 'basic needs', as the former includes church contributions as an overall essential basic need (Thornton *et al.*, 2010).

Landlessness in Samoa

Thornton *et al.* (2010) cautiously proposed that landlessness in Samoa could be a result of a breakdown of a combination of linked sociocultural systems in villages governed by *matai fono* (traditional councils). These systems are founded on reciprocity of material resources (e.g. food and income), a commitment to a common mainline village church, and access to customary land. With respect to *matai* titles, there is the issue of title splitting, when one faction of a family does not recognize the *pule* of another in relation to land or decision making, and thus may be excluded from decisions regarding land allocation within the *aiga*. The *matai* and mainline church pastors hold considerable influence over all aspects of village life, which includes the allocation and distribution of material resources among village households. The increased fraying of these traditional systems is a notable trend that, to a certain extent, can be attributed to unrelenting financial burdens associated with mainline church membership and a lack of pro-poor community development initiatives at the local and national level.

Interviews with representatives from mainline church groups emphasized that they believe the church is only responsible for the spiritual development of the Samoan people, and if people are facing financial difficulties, then it is the traditional responsibility of their families to support them (Thornton *et al.*, 2010). However, when this need is neither filled by the *aiga* nor the church, people understandably become alienated and seek alternatives. These alternatives include leaving the village and joining a new congregation in Apia. Ultimately, this choice involves asserting individual rights, and placing individual and family needs and priorities above those of the *matai*, the local pastor and *aiga*. However, asserting independence and opting out of traditional structures can stigmatize dissenting individuals and households in severing ties with the kin-based economy, which can result in the forfeiting of customary land rights. As trustees of *aiga* land, the *matai* are unlikely to allocate land to a family member seeking independence or a more western, non-traditional lifestyle, as it is more desirable to allocate village land to *aiga* members who wish to use it for plantation purposes. In choosing to relocate to Apia, and refusing to contribute to the rural village church and the *aiga*, 'people lose their access to family land' (Thornton *et al.*, 2010: 36). Similar to other developing countries where traditional or customary lands were expropriated by colonial authorities, the lands in and around greater Apia are state-owned and not subject to *matai* systems of land governance. Therefore, Samoans who trade the conservative confines of traditional village life for urban independence (or some way along this continuum), find that urban mainline and new church membership is disentangled from the traditional *matai*-pastor relationships that are so characteristic of the rural villages.

However, the issue of landless Samoans is not very well understood and the underlying reasons are likely to be multi-faceted. Traditionally, a person can be landless if he/she is an untitled Samoan (no familial claim to *matai* lineage). A *matai*, as trustee of *aiga* land, can allocate land to untitled family members. However, there is growing concern that there might not be enough land available as the population grows due to both natural increase and in-migration with returning Samoans from overseas. Thornton *et al.* (2010: 37) explains, 'In the old days, families were smaller. In the last 50 years, the population has increased and extended families have grown. The proportion of land available to each family is less and less'.

Landlessness is also linked to urban-rural migration within Samoa. When life becomes too difficult for urban-based kin, it seems that they do not simply return to their village of origin, nor are they welcomed back if seeking to return, depending on the ties maintained during their absence. Moreover, they might be viewed as a liability to the family, especially if they are untitled. Respondents expressed concerns over the prospect of urban-rural returnees, but also stressed that Samoans are too proud to return to the village if they are experiencing poverty and hardship. In this event, a returning member would be expected to build trust and fully contribute and re-assimilate to village life, socially, economically and financially (Thornton *et al.*, 2010: 37).

The earlier study proposed that, when considering spatial patterns and social change in Samoa, the emergence of a landless urban settlement class is rather untypical of Samoa and more common in other PICs and developing countries, in terms of urban living, poverty and social problems (Mawuli & Guy, 2007; Thornton *et al.*, 2010). The government has consciously tried with some success to provide every rural village with urban type amenities such as access road, piped water, electricity, and health and education services to an extent that probably does not exist anywhere else in the PICs.

Thus, we might conclude that it is not a lack of amenities that is the 'push' towards urbanization, but rather the other factors related to social change such as attitudes towards the church and kinship. Perhaps the most significant indicator of social change in Samoa is the modification, or some would argue decline, of traditional and customary linkages, which include familial and reciprocal kin-based relationships. The following sections will discuss the household survey and the possibility that landlessness is increasing in Samoa.

'Do you have a plantation?' Results from a survey of low income households³

A household questionnaire survey of 292 households was undertaken in 2010 in low income areas of urban Apia, where some 53 per cent of households are earning USD1200 per month or less from overseas remittances and (though less prominent in this survey), pensions and child support.⁴ Of particular interest is the number of households that lease land in Apia from mainline churches and the government, and have no ties to village *aiga* or access to other customary land through friendship, marriage with titled Samoans, trading or the like. Given the relatively small sample size, it is not possible to generalize about the full extent of urban landlessness in Samoa. Rather, these results should be interpreted as tentative, revealing insights into the nature of drivers modifying urban structures and broader social change in the *faaSamoa*. The results suggest complex and dynamic relationships between households, membership in mainline and new faiths, links with *aiga* in rural villages, and wider social and economic drivers of change.

Church membership

All of the urban households surveyed in the Aeale-Sogi community belong to an urban mainline church, with 87 per cent being Methodist (Table 1). The Apia area in the survey includes the traditional urban villages of Taufusi, Tuloto, Togafua, Fugalei and Lalovaea. Most of the respondents in this area (94 per cent) claim urban mainline church membership (92 per cent Catholic and 2 per cent Congregational). In contrast, the survey in the non-traditional villages of Vailele and Vaitele Fou revealed multiple faiths and new faiths were particularly highly represented. For example, Vailele households claimed 61 per cent mainline membership and 38 per cent in new faiths, while 52 per cent of Vaitele Fou respondents claimed mainline, and 40 per cent new faith membership. The new faith groups comprise numerous evangelical groups, such as Assembly of God, New Life, Worship Centre, Molimau Ieova, Livingstone, Voice of Christ and Seventh Day Adventist.

Survey results of urban church membership could be argued as reflecting the previous point of disentangled *matai*-pastor relationships in urban mainline churches. Some urban church members, despite having no rural village land access (rural plantations), have 'resource independence' in the use of household income and urban-based food gardens (urban plantations). Urban mainline and new church members are independent from rural village-based reciprocal systems and expectations of *matai*. However, nationally, mainline membership indicates a downward trend (Table 2), while membership of new churches is increasing (Table 3) (Thornton *et al.*, 2010).

Land ownership and customary land use

In the entire survey of 292 household respondents, nearly 60 per cent claimed urban land ownership (11 per cent declined to respond – 'not disclosed'). However, this

Table 1. Church membership in villages surveyed.*

RESEARCH AREA	APIA	VAILELE	LOTOPA	VAITELE FOU	AELE AND SOGI
Respondents	n=50	n=60	n=102	n=50	n=30
Religion	%	%	%	%	%
Catholic (mainline)	92	30	30	2	3
CCCS (mainline)	2	25	25	28	1
Methodist (mainline)		6	14	22	87
Apia harvest center	2	2			
Anglican		2			
Worship center		8	7	4	
SDA		3		2	
Nazareth			7		
Pentecost		2			
Molimau Ieova				2	
Livingstone				2	
Voice of Christ				2	
New Life				12	
Mormon (Church of Latter Day Saints)	2	10	5	4	
Seventh day Adventist		3			
Assemblies of God		8	12	12	
Islam	2				

*Percentages may not equal 100 per cent due to rounding or not disclosed.

Source: Authors' survey.

Table 2. The decline of 'mainline' Christian church membership, 1991–2001.

Denomination	1991 HIES Census (%)	2001 HIES Census (%)
Congregational	42.6	34.8
Catholic	20	19.6
Methodist	16.9	15

Source: adapted from Thornton *et al.*, 2010.

Table 3. 'New' church membership, 1991–2001.

Denomination	1991 HIES Census (%)	2001 HIES Census (%)
Mormon/Latter-Day Saints	10*	13
Assemblies of God	3.4	6.6
7 th Day Adventists	2.9	3.5

*Note: In 1971, Mormon membership comprised 2 per cent of survey respondents.

Source: Authors' survey and Thornton *et al.*, 2010.

finding is more useful when looking at each urban village location. In Aeale-Sogi, for example, 77 per cent of respondents said that they did not own the land that they live on (Table 4) and 77 per cent do grow food at home (urban plantation) (Table 5). These households also selected 'other' when asked if they pay rent, explaining that they sell surplus food to pay a lease on their urban home either to the Methodist

Table 4. Do you own land? (%)

	Aele-Sogi n=30	Apia n=50	Vailele n=60	Lotopa n=102	Vaitele Fou n=50
Urban land ownership	23	68	50	20	92

Source: Authors' survey.

Table 5. Households growing food on urban plantations (%).

	Aele-Sogi n=30	Apia n=50	Vailele n=60	Lotopa n=102	Vaitele Fou n=50
Households with urban plantations/gardens	77	10	42	70	Not disclosed

Source: Authors' survey.

Table 6. Do you maintain close village links? (%)

	Aele-Sogi n=30	Apia n=50	Vailele n=60	Lotopa n=102	Vaitele Fou n=50
Maintained rural village links	43	Not disclosed	38	70	100

Source: Authors' survey.

church or to the government. Many Aele-Sogi residents (57 per cent) do not maintain close links with their rural villages (Table 6) and are essentially alienated from the *aiga*, with no customary access to rural plantation land. The fact that the majority of respondents are growing food at home is reflected in the relatively low weekly purchases of food items at the supermarket, where 80 per cent spend between WST0–WST100 per week. Throughout the survey, types of food purchased at the supermarket include both produce and meat, which is costly since it is largely imported.

In the Apia area, 68 per cent of surveyed households owned (freehold) urban land (Table 4), but this land does not provide sufficient space for plantations (or urban home garden), thus 90 per cent do not grow food at home (Table 5). Apia households mostly do not maintain rural links and do not maintain reciprocal exchanges, neither food nor material goods, with their rural kin. However, 64 per cent of Apia area households claimed to receive overseas remittances and over 50 per cent of household heads are employed. The significance of remittances among households in Samoa is also typical of households in the wider South Pacific region. With consistent income sources, 98 per cent of these households spend between WST150 and WST250 per week on food items at the supermarket. Half of Vailele respondents (50 per cent) owned (freehold) urban land (Table 4), and 42 per cent grow their own food (Table 5). With 66 per cent of respondents receiving overseas remittances, many (62 per cent) do not maintain links with their rural *aiga* (Table 6). As a result, 68 per cent have weekly food expenditures that do not exceed WST100. Every household respondent contributes remittance payments to urban churches, which further indicates a rural-urban disconnect from the customary system of reciprocal exchanges.

At first glance, limited urban land ownership among Lotopa respondents (20 per cent) and strong rural links (70 per cent) appear to be correlated. However, 70 per cent keep an urban plantation and grow enough food to minimize purchases of food items

Table 7. Monthly income given to church (%).

Income to church (%)	Aele-Sogi n=30	Apia n=50	Vailele n=60	Lotopa n=102	Vaitele Fou n=50
<10%	53	6		70	38
10–40%	24	60	77	30	44
40–60%	20	34			18
60–80%			8		
80–100%			5		
None	3		10		

Source: Authors' survey.

(up to WST150 per week). Most (94 per cent) Lotopa respondents do not receive any other source of income apart from their wages or salaries and 90 per cent contribute to remittance payments of unspecified amounts. Contributions to churches (mostly new faiths) are quite low for Lotopa respondents in the survey. Only 30 per cent contribute 10–40 per cent of their income, while 70 per cent contributes less than 10 per cent (Table 7). Further research is required to clarify the nature of rural-urban links among Lotopa respondents, including how those that do not own land secure their tenure on customary land.

In Vaitele Fou, 92 per cent of households claimed urban freehold land ownership (Table 4) and all of the respondents maintain close links with the rural village (Table 6). These respondents, however, did not disclose the nature of these links and declined to answer several related questions. However, sources of income and types of expenditures among these households indicate that 98 per cent claim overseas remittances as an income source and 76 per cent are employed, which suggests that remittance income does not necessarily correlate with unemployment. These households (84 per cent) also contribute remittance payments to urban churches. Moreover, nearly 60 per cent of households spend between WST100 and WST250 per week on food items at the supermarket. Similar to Apia, these food items include fruit, vegetables and meat. Survey findings from both the Apia area and Vaitele Fou suggest that many households are financially and materially independent from rural *aiga*, primarily due to high employment and being recipients of overseas remittances, particularly in Vaitele Fou.

Despite 77 per cent of Aele-Sogi households having no access to customary land (Table 5), they are, however, investing in land improvements. These households are subsistence farmers who cultivate a few cash crops, such as peanuts and fresh vegetables. The cash income is given to urban churches (largely Methodist in Aele-Sogi), as most of these people are not contributing to the rural church of the village *aiga* and the reciprocal system of exchange of material and financial resources. In these cases the income is from the surplus, which means that their food is grown around the house (urban plantations), or on any piece of vacant land around their urban compound. The land is leased from the Methodist church and the government. Those on church land will give from less than 10–100 per cent of their income to the church, compared with 10 per cent for households on government land leases (Table 7). These findings of giving household income to the church vary widely, but differ from rural mainline membership where the village *matai* and pastor have been criticized for placing excessive 'gift-giving' demands on households to raise 'religious capital' for the rural village mainline church (Thornton *et al.*, 2010: 8).

Table 8. Church and well-being (%).

Link between church and well-being:	Aele-Sogi n=30	Apia n=50	Vailele n=60	Lotopa n=102	Vaitele Fou n=50
Agree	93	94	6	100	Not disclosed

Source: Authors' survey.

The church and well-being

A significant distinguishing factor between the new and mainline faiths is the observance of a regular 10 per cent (or less) tithe, or contribution to the church. Hence, new faiths are recognized as the churches of the poor and are increasing in popularity, particularly among single mothers (Thornton *et al.*, 2010). With a mixed mainline and new faith membership, every respondent in the Lotopa survey believed that the church contributes positively to community well-being (Table 8). Lotopa is one of the few villages surveyed with high employment, and 70 per cent of households contribute less than 10 per cent of household income to the church.

In Aele-Sogi, for example, 53 per cent of respondents contribute less than 10 per cent of their income to urban churches, which is relatively low compared with other mainline communities. In Apia, 34 per cent of respondents contribute from 40–60 per cent of their income to urban churches. Despite these variable commitments of household income to churches, there exists a strong link between the church and well-being in both Aele-Sogi (93 per cent) and Apia (94 per cent).

In Vailele, a multiple-faith community, 77 per cent of households contribute between 10–40 per cent of their income to urban churches, while 23 per cent are contributing between 60–100 per cent. Large contributions to the church lead to negative attitudes about well-being and church membership, as shown by the 94 per cent of the surveyed households that disagree with a 'church and well-being' relationship. The underlying issue in Samoa with heavy donations to the church is that high donations as a symbol of one's faith is giving way to tensions of increasing economic hardship. As a result, people are leaving mainline churches for faith groups that do not place such high burdens on membership. Among Vaitele Fou respondents, 44 per cent contribute between 10–40 per cent of their monthly incomes to the church. Interestingly, all of the Vaitele Fou respondents declined to answer the 'church and well-being' question.

Discussion

What is not clear from the data is the extent to which households without urban land ownership are new or mainline church members. And how does new or mainline membership affect rural-urban linkages where land is not owned? Moreover, it is not clear how respondents interpreted the concept of 'well-being', which might be understood in a spiritual sense, or material or physical welfare. These questions are being explored in further research by the authors concerning the nature of social and spatial change in Samoa.

Linking landlessness to customary land tenure

The survey revealed that many Aele and Sogi respondents have no village connection and are effectively 'landless' in the context of customary land rights. This is a crucial point in discourses on urban poverty in the Pacific Region, as 50 per cent of the respondents in Aele and Sogi are earning less than WST1000 per month and 40 per cent

are unemployed. These findings must be considered within the context of food poverty, as roughly WST600 per month is needed to keep a household of seven food secure – that is having access to food at all times. Vulnerability in Samoa has emerged as a pressing concern for government and some civil society and church groups (largely the new faiths). In this study, vulnerable Samoans have been identified as urban villagers without customary land rights, who do not share in reciprocal exchanges of material goods with rural village *aiga*. Although these relationships of connection to land and reciprocity are typically closely bound in Pacific island societies, the field-based research in this study has revealed that church obligations, combined with kinship, constitute a significant double social and financial burden on village-based households. There appears to be a relationship between urbanization and greater giving to the new faiths, as opposed to the traditional practice of giving to the mainline churches and extended family. It appears that the fate of the mainline churches is further reflected in the reduced participation of urban dwellers in their customary land system and this is impacting upon their prosperity.

Conclusion

This study has presented household survey data on the nature of urban settlements occupying customary and freehold land in Apia. It has also revealed the fraying of kinship relationships among a progressively urbanizing population as an indicator of social and economic change. In all five areas surveyed, households prioritize giving to the church as their primary or secondary commitment, followed by the payment of school fees. These findings suggest that urban-based kin do not contribute or participate in traditional reciprocal exchanges with their rural extended families, and instead target their resources towards the needs of the household and membership of urban-based faith groups. The survey revealed a growing trend where individuals and households are effectively rejecting the conservative rural village life for greater independence in the urban areas. This is particularly apparent in the non-traditional urban villages on freehold land, namely, Vailele and Vaitele Fou. This independence comes at the expense of no longer receiving traditional benefits of the kinship-based economy of reciprocation and redistribution of resources, which includes access to customary land. This is arguably a conscious decision as part of the trade-off in seeking independence from traditional norms and values associated with the *faaSamoa*. This loss of access to customary land is leading both to an increase in the number of Samoans seeking private land ownership, and also to an increasing prevalence of low income households that do not have the means to purchase private land or formal leasehold through church membership. Thus, church membership provides a safety valve for those seeking some form of alternative land tenure to formal freehold and leasehold systems. In both cases, some urban-based households are effectively landless and increasingly dependent on food and income sources from outside the reciprocal system of familial and rural village-based exchanges and customary land use. These findings reflect a further disconnect of Samoans from their traditional norms and values, including their ancestral past, and their mainstreaming into an increasingly Pacific urban way of life.

Endnotes

- 1 Western Samoan Tala WST (WST). USD1= WST2.19, based on a 2011 exchange rate average.
- 2 There are 5500 households in the Apia Urban Area (Government of Samoa, 2002), of which nearly 18 per cent (990) could not afford their basic needs.

- 3 A plantation refers to a food garden used by both rural villagers and urban households. Distinctions between the two locations will be made in the text.
- 4 Currently there is no official figure available for incidences of household poverty in Samoa. However, the 2002 Household Income and Expenditure Survey reports that 34 000 people live below the basic needs poverty line, of which 27 per cent (9180 people) are urban (Government of Samoa, 2002).

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