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Contesting Development: The Experience of Female-headed Households in Samoa

A dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements
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Rochelle. R. Stewart-Withers

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Abstract

There is a plethora of development literature, both academic and policy oriented, that problematises female-headed households in normative ways, positioning them as socially isolated, stigmatised, lacking in agency and poor, equated with the ‘feminisation of poverty’. Through positioning female-headed households as ‘other’ there is also a notable lack of regard for the diverse socio-political and cultural context which within female-headed households reside. By situating this research within a feminist post-development framework, and through the use of participatory methodologies and the articulation of individual biographies of the development experience, this dissertation seeks to re-position our understanding of the development experience of female-headed households.

Drawing on the case of Samoa, this study demonstrates how *fa’asamoa* (the Samoan way), inclusive of *fa’amatai* (customary system of governance), the *feagaiga* (brother/sister relationship) and the practice of *fa’alavelave* (demonstrating love and concern), all support the welfare and wellbeing of female-headed households, including any children born of these households. They also afford women in female-headed households a certain level of voice and agency. The thesis further highlights that the category of female-headed households was not well understood within Samoa because neither villagers nor policy makers labelled women in this way. Rather, women were recognised in relation to the cultural framework of *fa’asamoa* which situates them in terms of their position within their family, their natal village and the wider community. This illustrates the importance of culture when attempting to frame the development experiences of female-headed households in any part of the world.

Development researchers and practitioners need to seriously question just how useful the practice of categorising and labelling is to Development Studies. In highlighting the problematic nature of universal labels and categories, this thesis concludes that the starting point of analysis for female-headed households needs to begin with the socio-political-cultural context, as opposed to the category of female-headed households. Shifting beyond a desire to uncritically categorise and label will provide a space for envisioning new approaches to development thinking and practice, and for truly seeing the ways that people struggle, often successfully, to create and pursue opportunities.

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List of Acronyms

ADB - Asian Development Bank

ANZAC - Australian and New Zealand Army Corp

AusAID - Australian Agency for International Development

BRIDGE - Briefings on development and gender

CBOs - Community Based Organisations

CDP - Committee for Development Policy

CEDAW - Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination

CEO - Chief Executive Officer

DAWN - Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era

DIFD - British government's Department of International Development

FAO - Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations

FHHs - Female-headed households

G8 - Group of Eight: (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States)

GAD - Gender and Development

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GNI - Gross National Income

GNP - Gross National Product

GoS - Government of Samoa

GoWS - Government of Western Samoa

HDI - Human Development Index

H/H - Household

HIV/AIDs - Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome

HPI - Human Poverty Index

IDA - International Development Association

IDS - Institute of Development Studies

IFAD - International Fund for Agricultural Development

IMF - International Monetary Fund

INSTRAW - United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women

ILO - International Labour Organisation

LDC - Least Developed Country

MDGs - United Nations Millennium Development Goals

MHHs - Male-headed households

MIRAB - Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy economy

MoWA - Ministry of Women's Affairs

NGOs - Non-Government Organisations

NZAID - New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency

ODA - Overseas Development Assistance

OUNHCHR - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PGNs - Practical gender needs

PPA - Pacific Platform for Action

PPSEAWA - Women for Peace, Understanding and Advancement

PRSPs - Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

RPPA - Revised Pacific Platform for Action

SGNs - Strategic gender needs

SIDS - Small Island Developing State

SOEs - State Owned Enterprises

SPBD - South Pacific Business Development

TV - Television

UNCTAD - United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

UNDAW - United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women

UNDP - United Nations Development Programmes

UNESCO - United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation

UNICEF - United Nation Children's Fund

UNIFEM - United Nations Development Fund for Women

USD - American Dollars (currency)

WAD - Women and Development

WFP - United Nations World Food Programme

WID - Women in Development

WIBF - Women in Business Foundation

WTO - World Trade Organisation

Glossary of Samoan Terms and Sayings

‘āiga - nuclear, immediate or extended family/kin group – descent group

‘āiga potopoto - large extended family or kin group

aitu - human gods or ghosts

ali’i - a chief title (any chief but not orator)

alofa - compassion, love, concern

amio kerisiano - Christian behaviour

amio tamali’i - diplomacy

Apia - capital of Samoa

atua - non-human gods

anualuma - daughters or single women and widows

anualuma o tama’ita’i - daughters of the village which includes sisters and widows

‘aumaga - untitled men of the village

ava - respect

‘ava - a ceremonial drink made from the root of the *piper methysticum* plant

avā a taulele’a - wives of the untitled men

e au le ina’ilau a tama’ita’i - the legacy of women is one of total achievement

e pala le ma’a ‘ae le pala le ‘upu - stones may be reduced to sand, but words never decay

e sola le fai, ‘ae tu’u le foto - the stingray escapes, but leaves behind its barb

e tāua le tagata i totonu o lona ‘āiga - everybody is important within their own family

e tele a’a o le tagata i lō le lā’au. Ole tagata ma lona ‘āiga o le tagata ma lona fa’asinomaga - our language is full of expression denoting the cultural aspects of our links to one another, our relationships and our connections

fa’aaloalo - respect, politeness, courtesy, reverence

fa’afailelegā tama - nurturing the offspring

fa’afaletui - the critical process of weaving together information

fa’afetai - thank-you (*fa’afetai lava* - thank-you very much)

fa’aילו ga tama - to distinguish a child or young one

fa’akerisiano - Christianity

fa’alavelave - refers either to a problem, a difficulty, a small disturbance in routine, or a domestic crisis, or it makes reference to the larger, formal, traditional ceremonies or occasions of exchange. In this second context, *fa’alavelave* is therefore the practice of showing thankfulness and appreciation, love and concern

fa’aleleiga - reconciliation

fa'amagalo - forgiveness

fa'amatai - customary system of governance

fa'asamoa - the manner of the Samoans; according to Samoan customs and tradition

fa'asinomaga - connections or relationships

fa'atoesega - process of formal apology

fa'ato'ilalo le 'aiga - causing the family to sink

Fa 'avae i le Atua Samoa - Samoa is founded on God

fafine - woman or women

faiā - the links one has to another

fale - house

faletua ma tausi - wives of the titled men (chief's wife - *faletua*; talking chief or orator's wife - *tausī*)

feagaiga - agreement, contract or covenant, the relationship between brother and sister is a *feagaiga* relationship. Also the respect shown towards Samoan women

fealofani - getting on well with each other

fesoasoani i le 'aiga - helping the family

fiapalagi - to behave like a European, often used in a critical way

fono - the governing council of the village, which is comprised of *matai*, the head of the various 'aiga. There is also the a national *fono* of *pulenu'u*

fono a Matai - council of chiefs

gagana - language

ia gata ai i totonu o fale nei le mea ua tula'i mai - what has happened or has arisen must be kept and restricted within this house

'ie toga - very finely woven mats, known as fine mats

ifoga - performing a public act of apology and penance

Komiti Tumamā - women's (health delivery) committee

lauga - oratory

lavalava - length of cloth, which is wrapped around one's waste and worn like a skirt

le tantua - lacking of service, not serving

lomi - gentle massage

loto mauālalo - being humble

loto nu'u - having a sense of community

lotonu'u - maintaining/restoring pride

lotu - religion

māasiasi - guilty for having brought the family into disrepute

malō - government

malosi o le nu'u - the strength of the village

mamalu - dignity, honour

matai - chief or orator (*ali'i* or *tulafale*) a political representative of an *'āiga*, custodian of *'āiga* land, sometimes viewed as the head of the extended family (*matai* is both singular and plural)

mativa - poverty

Mau a le Pule or *Mau* - a non-violent resistance movement to European rule

mea alofa – gift or the practice of giving, receiving and sharing of gifts (literally means 'thing of love')

momoli - provide assistance/express solidarity

Nafanua - the Samoan pre-Christian war Goddess

nofotane - wife married into the family

nu'u - village

o ē 'uma e tau ile suafa ma le fanua - all those who are bound to the title and the land

o le ala i le pule o le tantua - the way to authority is through service

o le nu'u o ali'i - Village of the Gentlemen

o le nu'u o tama'ita'i - Village of the Ladies

o le teine o le 'i'omata o lona tuagane - a girl is the inner corner of her brother's eye.

o Samoa o le atunu'u ua 'uma ona tofi - Samoa is an already defined society

osi 'āiga - proactive in support of the family

pa'ia - sacredness

palagi - European person

pōlua - night dances

pule - formal political authority, in particular refers to that of the *matai* over the allocation and use of family held resources, such as land. Also refers to informal notions (which are just understood) of authority, leadership and standing

pulenu'u - the village mayor, chairman of the *fono*. Liaison between village and national government

sa - taboo, forbidden or sacred

Samoa mo Samoa - Samoa for Samoa

Savai'i - the larger but less populated island of the two main islands that make up Samoa

sene - Samoan currency as in cents

si'i - the tradition of donating and presenting goods, money or food

tafamamao - vision

tālā - Samoan currency as in dollars

tamāiti - children

tapu - sacred, sacred bonds

tapua'iga - waiting for a chance for success

Taupou - ceremonial virgin princess

tautua - obligations, duty or service

tautuanā ma 'oe le atunuu - bear in mind the land of our fathers

teine - girl or girls

teine o le town - town girls

tofi - status/position

to'ona'i - Sunday lunch

toso i lalo le 'aiga - to bring the family name down

tu ma aga - respectful behaviour

tu ma aga mamalu a Samoa - dignified customs and practices of Samoa relating to custom, tradition, personal dignity and etiquette

tui - weaving

tulāfale - a talking chief/orator title

umu - a customary way of cooking food with heated stones

Upolu - the most populated island of Samoa where the capital Apia is situated

va feāloalo'ai or *ava fatafata* - the face to face relationship

(Sources: Aiono 1986, Fairbairn-Dunlop 1991, 1996, Lui 2003, Macpherson and Macpherson 1987, Maiava 2001, Meleisea and Schoeffel Meleisea 1987a, Milner 1966, Mulitalo-Lauta 2000, Ngan-Woo 1985, O'Meara 1990, Tamasese *et al.* 1997).