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

A dissertation presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Development Studies

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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
A'pia - capital of Samoa
atu - non-human gods
anahuma - daughters or single women and widows
anahuma o tama’ita’i - daughters of the village which includes sisters and widows
'anmaga - untitled men of the village
ava - respect
'avā - a ceremonial drink made from the root of the piper methysticum plant
avā a tanule'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 ‘apu - 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 lū le lā'un. 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'adoalo - respect, politeness, courtesy, reverence
fa'afaitamā - nurturing the offspring
fa'afaitamā - the critical process of weaving together information
fa'afētai - thank-you (fa'afētai lava - thank-you very much)
fa'aigo 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’delleiga - reconciliation
fa'amagalo - forgiveness
fa'amatai - customary system of governance
fa'asamoa - the manner of the Samoans; according to Samoan customs and tradition
fa'asimonaga - connections or relationships
fa'atoeseaga - process of formal apology
fa'ato'ilalo le 'āiga - causing the family to sink
Fa 'avae i le Atua Samoa - Samoa is founded on God
fafine - woman or women
faii - 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 - tausi)
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 'āiga - 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 'āiga. 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
langa - oratory
lavalava - length of cloth, which is wrapped around one’s waste and worn like a skirt
le tautua - lacking of service, not serving
lomi - gentle massage
loto manālalo - 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
mālō - 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
Na'ānua - the Samoan pre-Christian war Goddess
nofotane - wife married into the family
nu'u - village
o e 'uma e tan ile suafa ma le fanna - all those who are bound to the title and the land
o le ala i le pule o le tautua - 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'ī - Village of the Ladies
o le teine o le Yoimata 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
tafamamoa - vision
tală - Samoan currency as in dollars

tamaiti - children

tapu - sacred, sacred bonds

tapuaʻiga - waiting for a chance for success

Taupou - ceremonial virgin princess

tautua - obligations, duty or service

tautuanā maʻe le atunuu - bear in mind the land of our fathers

teine - girl or girls

teine o le town - town girls

tofi - status/position

toʻonaʼi - Sunday lunch

toso i lalo le ʻāiga - 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

tuafaʻale - 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 fatafatu - the face to face relationship