

The Sāmoan Village, the Brother-Sister Relationship and the Rule of Exogamy

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Abstract

To the Western mind—as represented in most anthropological accounts—the “man/woman” differentiation is the broadest “gender opposition” subsuming all other more specific differentiations such as husband/wife, brother/sister, son/daughter, etc. The paper proposes that this Western illusion is deeply entrenched within contemporary gender studies, a consequence of the even broader Western analytical tradition based on the tool of dualistic complementary oppositions. In many anthropological accounts the traditional gendered spheres of ‘nu’u o tama’ita’i and ‘nu’u o ali’i in most Sāmoan villages have been misrepresented in as pertaining to a division of responsibility or interest between men and women. This however is quite alien to Sāmoan conceptions in which males and females are defined by their distinct status and roles vis-à-vis one another, as brother and sister (tuagane/tuafafine) or as man and wife (tamāloa/āvā). The social structure of traditional Sāmoan polities or villages requires brothers and sisters to take their husbands and wives from other villages, brothers bringing their wives ‘in’, while their sisters go ‘out’ to their husbands. Village endogamy is deeply disapproved. The organisation of a village is thus based on a brother/sister distinction through a triad of founding names (titles), their sons and their daughters, and excludes wives.

Keywords: Sāmoa, gender, social organisation, marriage, kinship, siblingship, endogamy, exogamy.

Introduction

An Enigma

Gathering contemporary accounts of how Sāmoan people view their village organisation enables us to understand how the *nu’u* (village/polity)—and not only the *‘āīga* (local or extended family)—is a fundamental unit in the social structure. The *nu’u* although usually translated as “village” is more than a settlement, but a ‘polity’ comprising a territory and a community bound together through many rules and obligations. A *nu’u* is first and foremost a social grouping rather than a geographical entity. In this paper I will use the term “village” rather than “*nu’u*” to refer to the community, to avoid confusion with the social groups within a village also metaphorically referred to as “*nu’u*”. The term “family” will be used when the reference is to the part of the *‘āīga* that is living in the village, and “*‘āīga*” when referring to the extended family encompassing those who reside in other villages. The enquiry here is limited to (Western) Sāmoa villages, but, from few discussions I had during the early 1980s in American Sāmoa, I have no doubt that it entirely applies there as well. The analysis presented here is based on observations made during the 1980s. Today, Sāmoans consider many of those issues differently, as will be discussed in the last section of this paper.

Among village rules is a strong rejection of intra-village marriage. This rejection is surprising since the families that make up a village are not literally *‘āīga*, in the sense of being related closely enough to forbid any intermarriage on a kinship basis. But Sāmoans condemn marriage within a village. It was thus not a question of kinship, but one of the village as a community. According to all the Sāmoans I have met, the idea that intermarriage within the *nu’u* should not happen goes back as far as family accounts stretch (the late 19th century), but they have no explanation for this part of the ‘custom’ (*āganu’u*) or would only say “people of the same village are too close”. We get a better understanding once we uncover that, at a certain encompassing level of representations of what is a

nu'u, all villagers are “brother or sister” to each other, as will be further discussed. This village organisation is another example for the prevalence of the ‘brother-sister relationship’ (*feagaiga*) in Sāmoa (Schoeffel 1978a, 1979, 1995; Tcherkezoff 1993, 2003: 276-494; 2008a, 2008b: 319-321, 2011; 2016: 252-312; Latai 2014, 2015, 2016).

This brother-sister overarching link becomes evident if we analyse the composition of the village, not just as a collective of families but, more importantly, made up of three ceremonial groupings that includes everyone and that are also called “*nu'u*”: firstly, the group of each family ‘representatives’, the family heads (*sui, ulu o le 'āiga*) called *matai* (translated in the literature as title-holders or “chiefs”), secondly the boys and men of the village designated by the chiefs as their “sons”, and third, the girls and ladies of the village designated by the chiefs as their “daughters” or “sisters”. A village is a set of families, but, as a community, it is a “sacred circle” (*alofisā*) of chiefs made as one, and these chiefs have “sons and daughters” who are thus considered to have a brother-sister relationship. One consequence is that the marital links within the village are put at the back of the scene, nearly invisible. It is rather easy to maintain the marital links in the backstage, except when a marriage occurs within village members.

The ethnographic literature is nearly silent on this condemnation of intra-village marriage, which has thus escaped discussion and analysis (but see Gilson 1963, 1970: 22; Schoeffel 1979, and Aiono 1986: 104, ms.3; the observations go back to the 1950s for Gilson, and earlier for Aiono who mentioned to me accounts handed down by her grand-parents). The reason for this relative silence in the literature is twofold. First, the principle of village exogamy is expressed as an ideal, rather than as an absolute rule such as would apply to incest. Secondly, social life needs to be analysed at village level and not only, as the literature to date reflects, at the first unit that the observer comes across beyond the individual—that is, the family.

Any visitor to Sāmoa can observe that the relevant social units in daily life are the family and the village (see Tcherkezoff 2003: 55–96, 2008a). Each individual belongs to at least one family and one village, and most of the obligations and restrictions guiding his life result from his dual membership of these two units. Every Sāmoan is aware of this membership system and talks extensively and spontaneously about it whenever there is a problem among relatives or in the neighbourhood or when explaining the ‘Sāmoan way’ (*āganu'u fa'asāmoa*) to foreigners. Remarks include statements defining marriage restrictions, such as, “you can’t marry anyone that’s *'āiga* with you”. But additional statements may be heard when an opportunity arises. In a conversation about a young woman, for example, someone from the village may say wistfully, “She isn’t happy with her husband”. The conversation may proceed:

‘Why not?—‘Because she was in love with someone else.’—‘Why didn’t she marry him then?’—‘Because the parents didn’t want them to.’ [A pause, and then:] ‘Didn’t you know...?’ [Another pause and then, in hushed tones:] ‘They’re from the same village.’

The problem caused by their common origins does not surface in conversations about defining notions of family or village, but in personal stories like this. Much later, one discovers that a couple one knows is “from the same village, but nobody talks about it, because what they have done is unseemly”. One then notices that such uncommon couples—at least they were uncommon in the 1980s—are never at the forefront of village life. Thus it becomes apparent that there is a glaring contradiction between village endogamy and the status system.

It then becomes easier to understand why the prohibition on village endogamy is not defined as incest. It is absolutely 'forbidden' (*sa*) to marry a person related to you; it would be committing 'incest' (*māta'ifale*). Apart from family and village custom, the word *sa* is used for all prohibitions decreed by religion and government. When asked why families do not wish their children to marry within the village, however, Sāmoans will invariably answer that it is because it is 'unseemly' (*matagā*), 'shameful' (*mā*), 'bad' (*leaga*). Thus, it seems that intra-village marriage is condemned in terms that denote the unseemliness caused *once the act has been committed*, implying that the problem has more to do with the consequences of such a union within the community.

Sex and Gender

Indeed the consequences of village endogamy are heavy. The main consequence is a considerable loss of status for the wife (and consequently, but in part, for the husband as well), as the woman is no longer a "sister" in the village. In order to be able to appreciate this, the status groups that make up a village need to be clearly understood. At this stage, a further surprise emerges, not because of any apparent contradiction between the data gathered, but because of a discrepancy between observations in the villages and anthropological literature on this issue. Most of these claim that village organisation is based on divided spheres of responsibility between men and woman (Mead 1930: 31; Shore 1982: 98). They misunderstand the metaphorical terms "*nu'u o ali'i*" and "*nu'u o tama'ita'i*" to refer to the "village of men" and the "village of women" instead of the more approximately and contextually correct gloss; "village of fathers/brothers/sons" and "village of sisters/daughters" (but see the critiques by Schoeffel 1978a,b, 1979—who was the first scholar to explain that the male-female division derives from the sister and brother's complementary roles rather than the husband and wife's—by Aiono 1984b and Tcherkezoff 1993, 2003: 459-468).

The observer is up against a difficulty in Sāmoa that the region's anthropology has seriously underestimated or simply ignored (with the exception of Schoeffel, *op.cit.* and 1995, 2011, 2014) because of a massive Western bias. To the Western mind, the "man/woman" differentiation is the broadest "gender opposition" and includes all other more specific differentiations, such as husband/wife, brother/sister, son/daughter, etc. We begin to understand the history of that Western illusion, deeply entrenched within contemporary gender studies, which is itself a consequence of the even broader Western analytical tradition based on the tool of dualistic complementary oppositions (see Thery 2007, 2008; Downs 2009; Tcherkezoff 1987, 1994, 2008b, 2011, 2014). In Sāmoan studies, Shore (1982) is a classic example, where the pseudo-dualism of Sāmoan gender is integrated into an even more general social and cosmological dualism. The book became widely read, being the first study of Sāmoan social structure since Mead (1930), while the more accurate view presented by Schoeffel in her unpublished Ph.D of 1979 remained known only to some specialists.

In Sāmoan language and values, however, the gender distinction (in the Western sense) is narrowed down to sexual relationships: the male and female united by sexual intercourse, whether actual or potential. The brother/sister distinction, however, is defined in terms of 'kinship' (*'āiga*) 'genealogy' (*gafa*, *āugānofo*). In Sāmoa, these two types of membership are viewed as being opposed to each other or, at least, as two views of mankind that must be kept apart. The sex/gender distinctions of 'male/masculine' and 'female/feminine' are both understood in Sāmoan to carry the implication of sex and reproduction; a person is either male or female, which speaks of a world

modelled on animals, on 'living creatures' (*meaola*), in which all actions are said to be 'nocturnal' (*fa'apōuliuli*) and therefore also unseemly, shameful or bad like everything associated with the 'night' (*pō*) as a cosmological element. A person, however, lives in a village because he belongs to a family and, therefore, to a genealogy. That makes everyone a 'child', a 'child of a family' (*tama o le 'āīga*) and places him among children, where everyone is a brother or sister. All that is on the side of 'light' (*āo*). This extends to the village level. People are brothers or sisters not just within a family 'āīga, but also through 'custom' (*āganu'u*; literally the essence [*āga*] of village-community [*nu'u*]). The man/woman or male/female distinction, in its restricted form of gender difference and belonging to the 'living creatures' *meaola*, is maintained outside the village. In contrast the brother-sister distinction is operative within village relationship. In summary, this is the answer to the apparent enigma of the condemnation of intra-village marriage.

Sāmoa and its Social Organisation

Sāmoan Custom

The broadest notion is 'Sāmoan custom' (*āganu'u fa'asāmoa*), shortened to *fa'asāmoa*: rules of greetings, invitations, obligations and prohibitions. One notices that greetings and ways of showing one's identity always have the same reference points: on one hand, the village name and, on the other, the family name or "title" (*suāfa matai*). Once these names have been exchanged, host and visitor know how to establish a mutual 'respect' relationship (*fa'aāloālo*)—where to sit in the home, whom to serve first at a meal and which lexical register to be used when talking to each other (there are often two or even three different ways to say "please come in, sit down etc.", depending on the status of the person invited). In Sāmoa, all public or just visible interaction (a reference to the village, home and "light"—that is, daytime or around a kerosene lamp or electric light in the home at night) is asymmetrical, involves "respect" and requires everyone to know more or less how to assess his or her own status with regard to others.

There are two orders of chiefs (*matai*); those classed as *ali'i* are addressed with certain honorifics, and preside at meetings where they remain seated, eat lightly and drink tea in small cups, all of which are signs, not of weakness, but of greater sacredness. Few words and gestures are needed, as the authority represented by these chiefs is great. Those of highest rank have the final say when a matter is discussed. Other *matai*, known as *tulāfale* or *failāūga*, (orators), speak more, make their speeches standing, eat more at meetings and feasts, and their genealogies generally spring from those of *ali'i* chiefs. Overall, *tulāfale* are vested with less sacredness than *ali'i*, but, in a given locality, a *tulāfale-ali'i* title may have a greater rank than all the *ali'i* present (Shore 1982; Tcherkezoff 2000a, b).

Respect is assessed once the village and 'āīga names are known. They apply throughout the island group and everyone agrees that all family names could ideally be classified in hierarchical order, but of course there is no agreement on the ranked order of such a hierarchy. In approximate terms however, knowledgeable people immediately assign a rank to a name on hearing, deeming it "very great", "great" or "small". At island-group level, the hierarchy is relatively ill defined and sometimes quite controversial. There is also a distinction between the western islands of the Sāmoa archipelago that have constituted the independent state of Sāmoa since 1962 and the eastern islands (American Sāmoa). In the latter, the ancient hierarchy was quite clear (19th century accounts

and legends all cite Tui Manua, but the administrators of American Sāmoa abolished the title in the early 20th century). Later, customary law there has been to a large extent codified under American law, whereas in (Western) Sāmoa this has only been done to a very limited extent (Va'ai 1999) and no foreign power was ever able to abolish any titles. In Sāmoa, the finer details are unclear, as there are several thousand *'āiga* names, but clear in terms of major areas. There are ten or twenty "very great names" that everybody knows, even youngsters. Otherwise, one has to come down to district and even more to village level to find names that are well known to all and constitute a more specific hierarchy. The 'district' (*itūmālō*) is an ancient notion from the times of wars (etymologically "the winning [*mālō*] side [*itū*]"), and thus its boundaries sometimes changed through war or alliances prior to European contact. Since independence, the country has been divided into more districts for electoral purposes, with each district sending a representative to the national Parliament. (Tcherkezoff 1998, 2003: 211-274, 2008a: 285-292; Meleisea *et. al.* 2015).

Most social interaction takes place at village level, however, where hierarchy is clear. Every time the various family heads (their *matai*) gather, they have to know where to sit and when it is their turn to speak and take the *'ava* (kava, the ceremonial drink when only one person drinks at a time). The *nu'u* is a fundamental concept contained in the word for "country" as evidenced when referring to Sāmoa (or American Sāmoa or any other social and political entity in the world mentioned on local television or the press): it is *ātunu'u*, which literally means "a chain (*ātu*) of communities, villages or polities (*nu'u*)". Also, as already mentioned, the word for 'custom' as used when Sāmoans talk about their lifestyle, is *āganu'u fa'asāmoa*, meaning literally "the essence (*āga*) of *nu'u* life in the Sāmoan way". A social human is a human that lives in a *nu'u*.

The 'Āiga and Matai, Gender and Status

The village is a "sacred circle" of family names. The local and extended family (*'āiga*) is defined by at least one such founding name (*suāfa matai*), which is passed on by ritual bestowal and kept by each generation. The duty of bearing this title is called *matai* (Sāmoan chiefs were called, as elsewhere in Polynesia, *ali'i*, while *matai* were household heads; during the 19th century, a partial levelling occurred [Tcherkezoff 2000a, b]). All families have a *matai*, or chief, who represents an ancestor, and all family members are said to be "children" of the *matai*. The *matai* is said to be everyone's "father", which should not be all that surprising as, in a way, he is the embodiment of the founding ancestor. When the *matai* invested with the founding name passes away, another is chosen.

Anyone who can claim (and convince others) that he or she has a genealogical link to a founding ancestor (or any of his descendants who had born the ancestral title) is thus 'related' to the family and therefore potentially an heir (*suli*) to its title. All Sāmoans are linked through such links to many families through a very extensive cognatic and genealogical memory stretching back four to ten (in some cases over twenty) generations. In order to maintain an effective link, however, a Sāmoan must take active part in work required for ceremonial exchanges with other families, such as at weddings and funerals, and in major discussions, like those held for choosing someone new to ceremonially bear the founding title. Membership of a family is demonstrated by being able to show a connection to one of the past *matai*, whether through the male or female line, adoption or marriage (if a relation-by-marriage has received a 'founding' name through their spouse). This means that the genealogy of *'āiga*, in terms of its full extent, essentially consists of a line of *matai* (a

dynasty known as *āugānofo*), each of them bearing the same title as a first name, followed by the person's individual name that they had prior to being invested with the ancestral name.

The founding ancestor is usually a man and most *matai* are men. This observation opens a wide discussion. Firstly, there is a dimension that cannot be fully developed here, but which is essential to family organisation. When the whole family gathers for an important decision, especially choosing a new chief, it can (and some Sāmoans believe it still should) break up into two groups: the *tamatāne*, or descendants of the founding member's brothers or sons who are entitled to bear the founding name; and the *tamafafine*, or descendants of the founders' sisters or daughters who are not supposed to covet the title but who "know" by mystical means the right choice because they enjoy special communication with the origins, the divine and ancestral realm. Today, such a division is much less common, and families are simply made up of sub-lineages descended from both sisters and brothers who vie on a similar footing to bear the name. Although the younger generation now often do not even know the terms for these two groups, this division, well attested to in the nineteenth–early twentieth century, is still practised in some 'great' families and known to older people. Again, very few authors have pointed to that system (Schoeffel 1979 and, recently, Latai 2014: 305, n. 13), while it has been misunderstood by Mead (1930) and Shore (1982).

This *tamatāne/tamafafine* dimension touches upon the much debated issue of gender. What may seem to be gender roles must be understood from that encompassing level. *Tamafafine* and *tamatāne* are groups made of both sexes. The *tamafafine* represent the mystical knowledge; the *tamatāne* are there to "to hold authority" (*faipule*), but under the peace-making, mystical guidance of the *tamafafine*. Both groups are made of both sexes, but among *tamafafine*, women of high status (*sa'otama'ita'i*: see *infra*) usually take precedence, mostly embodying the qualities of the *tamafafine*. Conversely, among the *tamatāne*, men closely related to the title and having shown "strength" in doing "service" to the community mostly embody the qualities of the *tamatāne*. Thus, if most *matai* are men, it is not because of a Sāmoan expectation that holding power is an attribute of the male gender, but because it is an attribute of the *tamatāne* and it is within the *tamatāne* that a man seems more appropriate to carry the burden of power—but a woman can very well be chosen. The whole gender distinction (in Western terms) is an encompassed level of a broader (encompassing) distinction where the two terms are not the man and woman, male and female, but are the brother(s) and the sister(s) from whom *tamatāne* and *tamafafine* groups are born.

Of course, when this ancient distinction is forgotten or erroneously understood as a distinction between a "male line" and a "female line", the social roles of each side is reduced to a question of gender and opens the contemporary discussions about "male domination" in the *matai* system, and the justified call for more women to take the *matai* role. Now that contemporary Sāmoans often ignore the former sacredness of the *tamafafine* and the former sacredness of the ladies as sisters *feagaiga* within the *tamafafine*, now that there is only one coveted position, that is "to be a *matai*" and holding the 'power' *pule* attached to it, then the non-access of women to *matai* positions is seen as an "inequality". That inequality is wrongly attributed to some pseudo traditional Sāmoan custom that would have valorised the maleness in the position of chief since immemorial times.

As an "inequality", it must be redressed, in the name of human rights and gender equality. Hence the demand for women to be able to access to *matai* positions is upheld by many women and, gradually, more and more men. Of course, a number of *matai* (men) then fear that one day

women could be a majority in the village chiefs council (the percentages today are still very far from that vision—see below). With that fearful vision in mind, some villages enacted a decree (by the council of chiefs, of course) forbidding women to become *matai* in any family *‘āiāga* of the village. Of course, as this is now seen as extremely conservative, for non-acceptable reasons (“male domination”), those villages gradually lift that ban. More villages (that is: again a decision by the council of chiefs *matai*) limited their move in not allowing female *matai* to take part in the village council; thus, whatever is the policy within families of that village to bestow or not titles on women, at least the main seat of power (as it is seen now), that is the council of chiefs, will stay an all-male council. A detailed survey was recently done by the Centre for Sāmoan Studies and led to a report on « Women’s political participation in Sāmoa » which contains not only important statistical data but important sociological-anthropological analyses (Meleisea *et al.* 2015). Between 18 and 30 percent only of all villages have decreed one at least of the two modes of barring women to access *matai* roles (*ibid.*: 28). Nonetheless, women *matai* are still only 9 percent of the total number of *matai* registered, and the aforementioned survey found the percentage drops to 5.5 percent if one considers only “village-based *matai*” (excluding the town and overseas).

The entire island group is organised around a stock of founding titles. The stock is renewed and grows, as each *matai* may, if the family agrees, create secondary founding titles, which implies that he allocates them with accompanying land. Sāmoa’s overall history is also presented in these terms. The gods came together with the first mortal humans (of course created by the supreme god Tagaloa) and created name-founding ancestors. These forebears in turn allocated names and land to some of their relatives, often for services rendered in local wars. For our purposes, however, the relevant factors are that all Sāmoans define their place in the world in terms of their link to a given founding title and that all such titles have a hierarchical order. This order is ill defined in the larger geographical areas, but much clearer at district and, especially, village level.

The ethnographic literature on Sāmoa talks of ‘titles’ when referring to these names, and ‘chiefs’ (or ‘titled men’) to refer to the *matai*—the person in each family that has been invested with the name. The ‘title’ concept encapsulates both essential factors—the perpetually bequeathed founding name and the name’s rank in relation to the other names. It should be emphasised, however, that all Sāmoan *‘āiāga* have titles. Not having titles in families would be unthinkable, as an *‘āiāga* is a group that could be described as a type of ancestor-cult group where descendants strive to preserve the founding name. Thus all Sāmoan families are, by definition, ‘chiefly’ families. Here lies a gross error that observers made, including official UN commissioners who came to Sāmoa in the 1950s for preparing independence. All viewed the Sāmoan society as a class system in Western ways (“nobles/commoners”). We can understand how shocked they were when, viewing the society from this vantage point, and hearing that nearly everyone wished to have only the *matai* (but the word in English was “the chiefs”) to be candidates for future parliamentary seats, they lamented that Sāmoan society is still under the power of the “nobles” (Tcherkezoff 2000c: 181-183, 2003: 231-238, 2008a: 285-292). Even if they could not reverse this majority, they made their best to pass on to the UN nominated legal advisers (advisers for “helping” drafting the future Constitution) the message that the constitutional text should allow for future amendments “towards democracy”. This was to have far-reaching consequences in shaping the political scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the well-known 1990 “referendum” in favour of a universal suffrage for Parliamentary elections (at least for the voters; candidacy remained restricted to the *matai*).

The *matai* is merely the head of a family and there are as many *matai* as there are families. All senior family members choose their title holder; no rules of primogeniture or lineage preference necessarily apply. Individual aptitude is much more important and an heir (*suli*) may become ineligible to bear the founding title for inappropriate conduct. All the adults of an *'āīga* choose their *matai*, but they may also withdraw their support. The office of *matai* requires 'dignity' (*mamalu*) and the person's 'nature' (*āga*) and 'behaviour' (*āmio*) must befit the ancestral name he bears as a title and uphold the dignity of the ancestor that 'lives' (*ola*) inside him. From the moment he is invested, it becomes his day-to-day name, even to his children. In each generation, one of the founding ancestor's descendants must be invested with the founding name, which thus becomes a kind of title. The invested person is the receptacle of the ancestor's 'essence' *agāga* (in Christian times it became the word for "soul") and the ancestor's 'dignity' (*mamalu*). As such, he becomes the family's *matai*. It is significant that one of the ceremonial names used for the *matai* office is "the god here below" (*o le atua o lalonei*) an enduring reference to pre-Christian beliefs. The translation with 'god' is of course misleading and is used here only for sake of brevity. Even if, today, the word *Atua* is used only for the Christian God, apart from ancient frozen expressions as the one we quoted for the chiefs, it was applying to all superhuman forms, forces, objects coming from this superhuman realm, etc. (for a discussion on this pan-Polynesian notion of *atua* and the Western misunderstandings of it, see Tcherkezoff 2008c: 115-131). The name-founding ancestors were gods or, often, demigods from a union between a god and a mortal. The other founding ancestors were born to these first ancestors and received a name and land from them as a reward for their support during a war. In other words, all founding ancestors have some sacred authority. A *matai* is a living receptacle of such antique authority.

Exogamy

At first sight, it would appear that the exogamy rule in Sāmoa clearly refers to the concept of *'āīga*, whereby nobody is to marry anyone claiming to belong to the same *'āīga* (whether or not they live in the same village). Those who do are in the Sāmoan sense (although not necessarily in the criminal sense) committing incest (*māta'ifale*)—which literally translates as "facing inwards in the house". The reference is to the house (*fale*), which, as a concept, also defines the *'āīga*. (see Fox 1993; Lévi-Strauss 1984; Macdonald 1987). The *'āīga* link that rules out marriage is, however, understood in differing ways. It is said to be a "close" link but, on investigation, it appears that there are different levels of "closeness".

The most straightforward category is exemplified by two individuals belonging to two small *'āīga* (small in status terms, that is, with short genealogies). Their genealogies *gafa* do not 'meet' (*faiā*) and they can, therefore, marry. Shore (1976: 278) cites a young man who felt that, since he had never seen a particular young woman or her nuclear family before, three degrees were sufficient distance for him to marry her. There was no question of incest as, even though the couple's maternal grandmothers were first cousins, the respective families were not part of the same exchange or family meeting network. The fact that there could be, in another family *'āīga*, another single genealogy containing the origin of both the family titles involved is not a problem, as such knowledge belongs to the *'āīga* kin network of another title, that is, the original name in the genealogy, in the history of which two names were created in different generations. Any title-holder *matai* (who is also a land custodian) can create another name, which will also be a founding title, at

least if the holder gives land to the new name-bearer. A new *‘āīga* then begins. At some other time, another founding name is similarly created. These two *‘āīga* are “related” within the genealogy of the person creating the name, but soon cease to be related to each other (beyond the fourth or fifth degree and, more precisely, once ceremonial gift-exchanges with the original family have become few and far between). The history of a founding name, when told in descending order through the generations, stops at points where descendants obtained a name that in turn played a founding role. A name has a founding effect and becomes a title when associated with land that was either conquered or given (or received from the gods). A name therefore becomes a ‘title’ (*suāfa matai*) because of its sacred origin, or because it was created by another bearer of another founding name who gave land.

The other category is exemplified by two individuals belonging to a ‘great’ *‘āīga*, in the sense of a lineage to its maximal extent. Genealogies (*gafa*) go back a long way and specify the links made by marriage, so there is nearly always a connection between the two people if the investigation is taken far enough back. Marriage seems to be allowed more or less beyond the fifth degree but the limit for allowing marriage is based on frequency of common ceremonial cooperation. Ideally marriages should be made with a view to maximising the breadth of affinal connections that an *‘āīga* can draw upon for ceremonial exchanges. If the young people live in different villages and their families do not see much of each other, even though they know they are related, and if the mutual assistance with ceremonial gift-giving exchanges is minimal, because both families have set up networks with relatives that do not overlap much, the marriage is not really a problem. Beyond that, it is a matter of political manoeuvring, as great title issues are also a question of national politics. Criticism will soon be levelled at the couple if, for political or other reasons, they arouse bitterness, resentment, envy or jealousy. People in the upper political or status level will start grumbling about them along the lines of: “How can they claim to be standing for our traditional values when they didn’t hesitate to violate them by getting married to each other? You know, they were cousins” (Sāmoans refer in English to relatives of the same generation as themselves as “cousins” between whom marriage is “incestuous”). On the other hand, if the related couple do not make any enemies, the idea of incest will not cross anyone’s mind. Once again, the background is Polynesian with its relational notions of kinship-and-status. In the past as in the region’s contemporary nation states, kinship and politics are inseparable.

Matai and Nu’u

This examination of the rules of exogamy between *‘āīga* social organisation is, however, incomplete, as there is also the notion of the village which is the basis, as previously explained, for defining the concept of country and custom. This notion responds to two needs.

The first need relates to the hierarchy of family names or “titles”. Because names are titles, because their value varies according to their antiquity and because a genealogy’s length only makes sense when compared with others, a name’s rank has to be visible and, therefore, acquire substance by interacting with other names. The country and district are both too large for day-to-day interaction. It is, therefore, the village that provides the basis. A village consists of a number of families (with a great variety, from 10 to 40 or more), as their representatives, their *matai* meet to deal with issues affecting the community.

The second need is the connection with the land. The name of a founding ancestor, which defines the family, is not handed down as a title and does not lead to a new family unless there is land attached to the name as its 'home' (*nofo*). Family meetings are held in the land's 'great house' (*faletele*) and, although this rule is usually ignored today, the person chosen to bear the founding name is supposed to live on the land (or settle on it, if he lived elsewhere). He also becomes the custodian of the land, in fact, of the whole 'house' in the sociological sense of the term, that is, the name, land and houses built on it, as people settle there or are adopted. Any family member may settle on this land. If they subsequently leave, they do not lose their family membership, which they held before coming, as long as they demonstrate their connection through their 'service' (*tautua*) to the name, by contributing to ceremonial exchanges (*fa'alavelave*) or its other collective needs. 'Āīga are therefore organised around the inheritance of a name and its associated land and ancestral authority. In this sense they are comparable to the "houses" of European historical nobility, with the previously stated proviso that, in Sāmoa, all families are "noble".

A family name, which can only be handed down as a title if it is attached to land, draws its status from its rank within the "sacred circle" of titles that define the village's history and in which the ages of the various genealogies are compared. The village is therefore defined as a circle of families, although there are other terms that refer to the merely geographical location that makes up a village. This circle is part of the definition of an 'āīga, as a family cannot exist unless it belongs to a village and land is always village land. We can thus understand why banishment from a village was and is the supreme penalty in the customary judicial system in Sāmoa (Tcherkezoff 2003: 113-114, 133, 225, 249-253; 2008a: 258-259, 264, 282, 289; Iati 2009: 16-17).

A village is thus a circle of territorial ancestor names and of locations where the descendants live; these names have become family names. Each ancestor founded a name and identified a plot of land. The title's land always belongs to a village and all the titles make up the village's foundation. The title's "home" is a ceremonial house located on the land and each of these houses has a special name. As a genealogical identifier, however, the title is recognised throughout the country. People living in other villages can claim they are connected to the title. All the living and deceased descendants of a founding ancestor comprise an 'āīga, which may also include members by adoption. Those who marry into an 'āīga (because of the strong tendency of marrying to another village than one's own) may in certain circumstances be counted metaphorically as 'āīga, as, for example, when a man is given a title by his wife's family. Part of this 'āīga lives on its ancestral land, whilst other members live elsewhere by personal choice because anyone can decide to go and live with relatives elsewhere, or migrate overseas.

Within the village, a family is a house in the sociological sense. It is based on the mnemonic and ceremonial preservation of a founding name (often accompanied by secondary names belonging to the main ancestor's close relatives) with his/their ancestral authority, and associated with land. The land is an everlasting heritage, for which households only enjoy a life tenancy. It "belongs" only to the founding ancestors of the 'āīga and the living are merely "children of the land". The land cannot be sold; land classified as 'āīga land is not freehold. Sāmoa is famous for having preserved 80 percent of the country as "customary" land despite the colonial period. A further 16 percent of the country is State land (previously seized under German colonisation early this century and then frozen under the 1920-1965 New Zealand Mandate); the rest is private freehold land for Sāmoan citizens only and was originally "bought" in the 19th century by foreigners and subsequently

recognised by successive administrative powers (Tcherkezoff 2008a: 280-284; 2003: 107–152). But since the mid-1990s, there are attempts by the Sāmoan government and foreign “experts” on development to introduce some part of private-individual registration, in order to comply with demands by foreign investors, and recent legislation already permits the leasing of customary land (see Meleisea 1987, Tcherkezoff 2003: 107–152, 225, 249–253; 2008a: 280–289; Iati 2007, 2009, 2010: 191–192, 199–200; Meleisea and Schoeffel 2015).

Membership is not only passed on by unilineal descent; as stated earlier, but also by being a relative connected by any kinship pathway, through male or female links, to a current or past *matai*. There is also an extended use of adoption and, as previously noted; even a relative by marriage can receive a secondary founding name. Sāmoans use *‘āiga* more often than *fale* to refer to this set of people. The word *fale* when referring to the human group rather than the building (the same dual meaning exists in Sāmoa as under France’s *ancien régime*) is used, in its widest sense, to mean the whole line of *matai* (or non-unilineal descent group) and, in its narrowest sense, to mean all a couple’s descendants. The fact that it is a “house” in the sociological sense, however, is essential. The link with the land necessarily places these “houses” within a specific social unit: the *nu’u*. As previously described, this is much more than a mere geographical collection of houses. It is a social unit. Therefore, this calls for an examination of the groups that are organised and brought together to form the village, especially that these groups are also referred to as “*nu’u*”, as “circles” or sub-communities within the community.

Village Organisation

The Nu’u of Matai (“Chiefs”)

The observer of interactions beyond the *‘āiga* first comes across the concept of *fono*. The word means ‘meeting’ and can refer to any kind of meeting when followed by the name of the group concerned. When used on its own, however, a Sāmoan immediately thinks of the meeting of *matai* in a village. The *fono* is the council of *matai* or the “village council”. The *matai* regularly meet and make decisions affecting village life; these can be initiatives for economic cooperation, to allocate fundraising tasks to each family, to prepare a *malaga* (a visit to another village or hosting of another village), to help organise weddings or funerals associated with the great titles of the village, or its church ministers, discussing messages or orders from the central government, or deciding punishments.

The extent to which the village rather than the *‘āiga* is the custodian of ‘custom’ should be emphasised. Any breach of a prohibition, even between members of a single *‘āiga*, can result in a punishment decided upon collectively. Apart from very special cases, such as proven incest, the most common offences are breaches of ‘respect’. These can vary from collective cases (a member of family A insults the *matai* of family B) to individual offences, as when a young woman weeding in her garden is too skimpily clad (wearing shorts instead of a *lāvalāva*) and is noticed by the chief of another family. Other offences are instances of failure to comply with communal obligations, such as fundraising drives. Punishments range from small fines (in cash, tinned food or taro) to exile from the village. An expulsion can apply to an individual or a group, all of it or part of it (see references above). The land still belongs to the expelled family but the right to live on it remains subject to a collective village decision. No family can oppose the expulsion of any of its members. If the whole

family is exiled, other members of the same *'āīga* may come from another village and occupy the land. In this land rule, it can be seen how family is closely intertwined with village. The village is not simply a collection of families or separate units. It is the families' 'sacred circle' and, as such, a higher sphere of authority.

As in all meetings in Sāmoa, the *matai* meet in a circle at their *fono*. It is literally a "circle of chiefs". Like all meetings, it takes place in a house, the "great house" of a "great" family in the village (if there is a family that, by the genealogy of its name, far outranks all the others), but more often than not, the various great houses of the prominent families host the meetings in turn. The building is often round, but if it is oval or rectangular, as is sometimes the case, the seating order is the same. The family chiefs sit with their backs against the posts located along the house perimeter. The houses have no walls and are made up of a base on which posts arranged in a circle, or in oval or rectangle shape, supports the roof edges. A clear hierarchy is attributed to the posts. Without going into details, there are always 'four sides', already ranked, and within each side, order starts from the middle post and goes down on both sides, until reaching the next 'side'.

The result has two effects. Everyone sits at a place that has a different rank, but in the same circle facing the same centre. Everyone will speak (and drink the ceremonial kava), but in an order reflecting this hierarchy. Although the hierarchy appears to be fixed, it may be manipulated, for example if someone (either subtly or crudely) tries to show that he is not seated in a place befitting his status, or if he manages to give the impression that his speech is more convincing than those of others, or if he speaks before his turn. These breaches of protocol may earn his audience's admiration, thereby dispelling the irritation caused by his intrusion. By such actions he will try to magnify his status. Manoeuvres such as these may have been backed up by generosity displayed by his *'āīga* at ceremonial exchanges within the village or between his village and those of others, and by such efforts he may enable his *'āīga* to advance a claim that their genealogy goes back further than is commonly admitted. If he is convincing, the status of his *'āīga* in the village could change in over time.

At each meeting, then, circle of *matai* reveals a hierarchy among *matai* of the various *'āīga* and therefore a hierarchy among family titles. All meetings are held in an open traditional house without walls, with the whole village able to see and listen to the proceedings from outside. The hierarchy is therefore regularly displayed. It determines the order operating in other groups taking part in communal village life, which is discussed below.

Finally, Sāmoans have different ways of referring to the circle of chiefs in their conversation or ceremonial rhetoric. It can be just 'the *fono*', or more explicitly 'the *fono* of *matai*', or 'sacred circle' (*o le alofi sā*). As previously stated, the *matai*, the family heads invested with the title of the family, can be ceremonially referred to as "the gods here below" (*o atua o lalonei*) and this hallowed description is used for the *matai* of the *nu'u* collectively, or as it is often put, "the village of chiefs" (*o le nu'u o matai*). Thus, just like the whole village is the *nu'u*, the *fono* of the *matai* is itself metaphorically called a *nu'u*. In light of discussions above and to follow, let us note from the start that *matai* can be men or women, even if much more rarely women than men, and that, before the recent times of the last 20–30 years, their role is not primarily defined by their gender.

The Nu'u of Taulele'a ("Servers")

When the *fono* of *matai* make a decision, those who carry it out are the *aumāga*: the men living in the village who are not *matai*. They may cultivate common garden, repair buildings or, when there is a crisis, may act as police (for example, to force a recalcitrant family to comply with a decision). In Sāmoa, the standard police force used to operate only in the capital. It only intervened in a village if requested to by a member of the public or the council of chiefs. Such a request was always seen as shameful for the village, because, as visitors are told, “The real police in Sāmoa are the *matai* and the whole *fa’amatai*” (‘the way of *matai*’ *fa’amatai* is the whole system generated by the hierarchy of family titles borne by the *matai*). The men are also required to cook and serve food to the chiefs’ circle. All their tasks are a ‘service’ (*tautua*) to the chiefs and the community: I shall say ‘servers’.

They are known as *taulele’a* (singular form is *taule’ale’a*). The likely origin meaning of the term is ‘those who prepare or look after (*tau*) the kava for the chiefs’ and part of the preparation was chewing the roots before mixing with water (an ancient practice now abandoned). This etymology is usually unknown and may seem surprising to many, in Sāmoa or viewed from other parts of Polynesia, like Tahiti (see *infra*). The name *le’a* is ceremonial, while the ordinary term for kava is *’ava*. One of several examples is a *solo*, where mention is made of the wish to drink the *le’a* (*lo’u fia inu le’a*) and the words are followed by, “Behold these houses [where] the young girls’ (*teine*) and *taule’ale’a* groups are (*le galu teine ma le galu taule’ale’a*), those who are in yonder houses to chew kava for the chiefs” (*se’i latou māiā ai se ’ava o i fale na se’i taumafa ane ali’i*) (Moyle 1988: 176; see Pratt’s Dictionary 1960: 177). Aiono (1984a: 25) and Le Tagaloa (1991: 34, 44) consider the etymology certain. Also, the *taulele’a* group’s ceremonial name, *aumāga*, points to the same reference (the group of those [*au*] who chew [*ma + āga* as a nominalisation suffix]).

The word is well known in Eastern Polynesia (*taure’are’a*, see Grépin 2001, Levy 1970) and Sāmoan linguistics can bring some light. In French Polynesia today the term means “adolescence” for both sexes and “adolescents” for boys only. An etymology cited both locally and in anthropological literature suggests that the word means “time (*tau*) for fun (*’arearea*)” (Langevin 1990:68, quoted by Grépin *op. cit.*, p. 82), wrongly conflating two words. Indeed, in Sāmoan, *lealea* ‘go and show off to have fun’ (an uncommon word not listed by Pratt 1960 or Milner 1966, but spontaneously given to me by an informant—an angry mother asking her daughter where she had been) and *le’a* are two different words. But in Tahiti, the idea of the service through preparing the kava has been lost.

The difference between the Tahitian notion of fun and adolescence for both genders and the Sāmoan concept of ‘kava people’ doing ‘service’ confined to males, is further evidence of the oft-noted difference between the two cultural areas in their general depiction of gender difference. In Sāmoa, the brother/sister differentiation depicts the brother as being on his way to a title, from *taule’ale’a* to *matai*, with one of the services required being kava preparation. In contemporary Tahiti, the man/woman relationship unites both genders much more. With the changes of the last century in Tahiti, such as the disappearance of kava drinking rituals, male tattooing and chiefly titles in general, the notion of *taurearea* is referred to very differently and I would make the hypothesis that the word was artificially reconstructed to fit with the new outlook on life and came to mean “(fun during) adolescence”.

The duties assigned to the servers are known as ‘providing service’ *tautua*, and those who provide these kinds of service belong to the ‘servers’ circle’. As Sāmoans conceive it, to provide *tautua* is not only an honour, but also a means of advancement, as indicated by the saying “service is

the way to power” (*ala i le pule le tautua*), in the sense of chiefly authority. To become a *matai*, one must first be a *taule’ale’a*. All accounts indicate that, in the past, every young man joined this group at puberty after undergoing the tattooing initiation rite. Those who later became *matai* had to have been through this stage. Older informers clearly state that in the past it would have been unseemly and shameful to become a *matai* without first being tattooed and doing service. Some, of course, remain *taulele’a* all their lives, as one out of ten in the population of Sāmoa becomes a *matai* (based on figures of the 1980s: approximately 15 000 chiefs for a population of 160 000 in Western Sāmoa at the time). As the vast majority of *matai* are men, one out of five *taule’ale’a* will eventually become a *matai*. The *taulele’a* once served the whole village as its armed force and today they are still collectively known as the “strength of the village” (*o le mālosi o le nu’u*).

Today a person is still regarded as a child until leaving school. Those who go on to the end of junior secondary school and those who win a place in the National University of Sāmoa, or a scholarship to study overseas become *taule’ale’a* after they graduate. Sometimes, the kudos that comes with a qualification, particularly if it leads to a well-paid job, prompts the family to make the young adult a *matai* without first doing communal service. They give him a secondary title name or they split the founding name (the founding name can be split up and given to several people simultaneously or otherwise). ‘*āiga* with “great” names hardly ever do this, but those of medium-rank often do. The practice of splitting the name, that is bestowing it on more than one head, was recorded early last century (Meleisea 1987). Nowadays the same name could be represented by a man who stays in the village and also by one or more of his brothers or close kinsmen who had moved to town or emigrated and was valued for his remittances, as they contributed to ceremonial exchanges which enabled families to maintain their rank.

When the *taulele’a* meet to plan and allocate the tasks assigned to them, they sit in a circle in one of the houses, just like the chiefs, and the seating arrangement mirrors the rank structure of the *fono*, in this way, the son of the highest ranking *matai ali’i* of the village is deferred to as the leader of the *aumāga* (*sa’o’aumāga*). Their meeting is known as the *fono* of the *taulele’a* or, to metaphorically and ceremonially designate the group, the “*nu’u* of the *taulele’a*” (*o le nu’u o taulele’a*). Just like the whole village, the servers’ group on its own is called a *nu’u*. Its members are only men.

Gender, Sex, Affinity, Residence and Social Status

Gendered Conventions:

We have encountered the ‘village’ of the chiefs and the ‘village’ of the servers. Western observers need to resist temptation to think that it is the “men’s groups” that have been studied so far. It is true that the two groups account for the village’s entire adult male population. However, it would be false to assume that Sāmoans think of this category as representing a single-sex or even gender-exclusive whole. Neither of the two words meaning ‘men’ in general (*tane* or *tamāloa*) are used to refer to these two groups together. While *taulele’a* are always men, the same is not true of the *matai* who may be women (however recent research, Leasiolagi (Meleisea) *et.al.* 2015, shows that of all village-based *matai*, only about five per cent are women and a number of *nu’u* do not recognise *matai* titles when the holder is a woman—see the last section of this paper). Where an ‘*āiga* chooses a woman to bear their title, if their village has no rule preventing it, she is recognised as a *matai* and receives all the courtesies and privileges that accompany the status of her title. However many

women *matai* choose not to take their place in the circle of chiefs, feeling that they would be unwelcome there (*ibid.*)

Affinity and Residence:

The case of chiefs and servers who came to live in their wife's village is now examined. To begin with *matai*, among those sitting in the circle of chiefs, there may be, occasionally, a husband of one of the daughters of an 'āīga of the *nu'u*. He will be a man who came to live in his wife's family and who was chosen by her 'āīga to bear their title (or rather one of its secondary founding titles). In such cases, the man always comes from another village and often from a family that does not have a 'great' title (but who may be chosen in future to hold a title of his own 'āīga). He may hope that his wife's family will improve his prospects, even if it means living with his wife in her family's village and on its land. His wife's family may even prefer him to bear the name over other candidates, if he has good qualities, whether traditional (as a hard working gardener, good at public speaking) and/or modern (as a senior public servant or has another well paid job). The family may grant him a secondary title that it holds, so that the man can sit in the *fono* and lend extra weight to the interests of his wife's senior *matai* and her 'āīga. Some 'āīga have several founding ancestor names from secondary lineages. In addition, the senior *matai* of the 'āīga (its *sa'o*) may, in certain circumstances, create a new, secondary *matai* title and grant it with the consent of the 'āīga.

A man honoured in this is not distinguished formally from the other *matai*, even if, privately, people may mention to outsiders that he resides uxorilocally; in Sāmoan terminology he is a *faiāvā* (*fai* = make, *āvā* = wife). That is the general term that identifies men who came to live in their wife's village. Let us note that, when this man goes back to his own village and family, he may not be considered to be a *matai* there and would therefore join the *aumāga* that he belonged to before he married, went to live in his wife's village and got a *matai* title there.

Among *matai* who sit in the *fono* and who came from elsewhere as in-marrying husbands, there can be another type. He has a high title in his own family; he did not receive a title from his wife's family. He is thus not a *matai* in his wife's village, but is nevertheless at home there and the host village allows him to sit on the chiefs' council, particularly if his name is relatively 'great'. When decisions need to be made on village matters, his opinion counts as advice (*fautuāga*), but not authority (*pule*). I have, however, seen one such man who had become a central figure in his host village because of his public speaking abilities and knowledge of the country's major genealogies. There are also instance of women holding *matai* titles from their own village who settle in their husbands' villages. In these rare instances the husband himself has been a high-ranking *matai*. If the circle of chiefs permits, and if the woman herself accepts the honour, a woman *matai* may sit in the *fono* on an honorary basis. There are probably few, if any, cases of a woman taking a title bestowed by her husband's family.

A second category of men who reside in the village and on the land of their wives, are those without *matai* titles from their own 'āīga or that of their wife. Such men make this choice for various reasons. Some may hope to acquire a title there; some may have better economic opportunities there. In recent decades men from villages located very far away from the capital will chose to live with their wife if her village is close to town. But there is a heavy price they have to pay in terms of limited authority over his wife, and obligations to sharing household chores. Parents-in-law wield their authority over such a man and from his first day will be expected to do all the chores

performed by the young men in the household, such as cooking, gardening, repairs and serving his wife's parents. Such a husband is not treated any differently to his wife's brothers of the same age or younger. He fully shares the tasks that punctuate the family's home life, in which brothers provide 'service' (*tautua*) to their sisters. In addition, his wife's parents will give him orders in the same terms as their own sons: "Hey! Boy (*sole*)! Go and do the ...!" He refers to his mother-in-law as "my mother", and to his father-in-law as "my father". In short, he has become a quasi-junior son of the family, and in the public space, a quasi-younger brother of his wife.

The circles of *matai* and *taulele'a* together account for the entire male population of a village, with the exception of its ministers of religion (who come almost always from outside the village). While this fact may seem insignificant at first glance, it has a major consequence: a male in-law from another village who marries a woman and settles in her village will be integrated into the two existing ceremonial circles that we have discussed, the *fono* or *Nu'u o Matai*, and the *aumāga* or *Nu'u o Taulele'a*. In other words, male affines are at least partly integrated and accommodated in the *nu'u* of their wife.

In sum, there may be permanent male affines in the chiefs' circle or in the servers' circle. But there are no permanent women *matai* members through marriage. It could happen that a woman, a *matai* in her own village, marries a non-*matai* from another village. However, the idea that she might follow her husband to his village struck my informants as preposterous. The other possible scenario – his living in his wife's village where she holds a *matai* title—met with the comment, "Well, if he's long-suffering enough to live in his wife's village, he will of course be in the *taulele'a* circle". The 'long-suffering' comment relates to the fact that the husband would be in the group that serves the village and, therefore, 'serves' the circle of *matai*, which his wife is a member. It is not an issue for a sister to have a higher status than her brother (as traditionally she belongs to the 'side' that was seen as 'communicating with the gods' while her brother 'makes power' by bearing the title or, if he is a server, using 'strength' to 'do service' for the family and village), it is clearly a problem for a wife to have a much higher status than her husband.

Women's Committees:

Since the 1920s, village women's committees have been established throughout Sāmoa and have become a part of village organisation. In the 19th century Protestant missionaries came to Sāmoa as couples and imported gender-segregated teaching and division of labour. Missionaries' wives would gather all the village women—a category that made sense to a Western wife's mind and thus included both the daughters of the village and the wives who had come from other villages—and would teach them together (on this crucial role of missionary wives in Sāmoa, and the whole ensuing transformation of women's role from "sisters" and "covenant keepers" to "women" in the Western sense—that if first of all "wives"—, see Tcherkezoff 2008a: 271–276; Latai 2014, 2015, 2016: 53–77). When the New Zealand administration set up health committees that were managed by women, grouping village women together confirmed the system introduced by the missionaries. Shortly before independence, some local elite groups tried to use this structure as a basis for a true women's movement (see Grattan 1948; Schoeffel 1977, 1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1982; Aiono 1992, ms.1, ms. 3; Meleisea *et al.* 2015: 27–33). The outcome of this was complex in its finer details, but, in essence, family chiefs' wives, non-chief's wives and the village daughters spent more time doing things together for the village community than separately.

The Sāmoan term for a village women's committee is *komiti tumamā*, the word "komiti" denoting its foreign provenance, "tumamā" meaning "cleanliness or hygiene". These organisations have become an established part of village life, usually led by the wives of its highest-ranking chiefs. These groups had an important but largely utilitarian role to promote public health. Each committee is divided into groups comprising the wives of the *matai* (*faletua ma tausī*), the ladies of the village (*tama'ita'i*), and the wives of untitled men (*āvā taulele'a*). In meetings of the women's committee, the same ranked seating arrangements are followed, but the seating area of highest respect in the meetinghouse belongs to the *tamai'ta'i*, with the wives groups seated in the less prestigious areas.

The Nu'u of Tama'ita'i: The Circle of Ladies

The third circle with the metaphorical status of *nu'u* comprises that of the *tama'ita'i*. The women's committee is not the "nu'u o tama'ita'i". That honour belongs only to the *tama'ita'i* sub-group within the women's committee. In the event of disputes between the *tama'ita'i* and the *faletua ma tausī* (who have formal authority over the whole women's group, based on the status of their husbands), the *tama'ita'i* will usually prevail, pointing to the 'outsider' status of the leaders. Also, in certain villages, at some ceremonial events only the daughters of the village gather, excluding the wives (see Schoeffel 1979, 1982, 1985).

The circle of *tama'ita'i* comprises women who belong to the *'āiga* of the village, living there either permanently or temporarily. This, therefore, includes girls, young unmarried women, and also women who have married a man from another village and who brought him in, or who, although usually living (or have been living) in their husbands' villages, have temporarily (or permanently after separation or their husband's death) returned to their village. These women, even if married, belong to, take initiatives in and have rank in the *tama'ita'i* group independently of any husband. Everything depends on the family name they belong to in their own village. The etymology of *tama'ita'i* is unknown but is an ancient term, noted by Captains Cook and Erskine (see Tcherkezoff 2008c: 20 [n.4], 105–106). The word *ta'i* meant a group's 'front line', particularly in old time warfare. It is well known that, in some case, the first line was indeed made of the daughters of the chiefs' village attacked; either their sacredness would bring in the divine power and the army will win, or they will be taken as wives by the chiefs or chiefs' sons of the attacking party, thus avoiding bloodshed. Although unable to ascertain I would make the hypothesis that the word *tama'ita'i* is linked to that context. I have translated it as "ladies", as most Sāmoans do when explaining in English in order to discriminate from the word *fafine* or *āvā* referring to a woman as wife or sexual partner of a man.

Tama'ita'i who bear titles, derived from the names of female founding ancestors in their *'āiga* are invested by their families, and are known as *sa'otama'ita'i*. Such a title may be known as the *feagaiga* of a male founder. *Feagaiga* is the ceremonial term for any brother/sister relationship as well as the sister herself within this relationship (it is also the honorific used to address a member of the clergy). Only the highest ranking *'āiga* possess *sa'aotama'ita'i* titles and nowadays they are seldom formally bestowed. Any female member of an *'āiga* entitled to bestow a *sa'otama'ita'i* title may be formally addressed as such. In some villages the adult *tama'ita'i* have their own Sunday banquet or *to'ona'i*. Recently there has been a revival of the bestowal of *sa'otama'ita'i* titles, often split up and conferred on several women, just like a *matai* title.

In earlier times young virgin girls from *'āiga* with "great names" would be invested with the name of a genealogically important ancestress (often the sister of an important ancestor) and were

known as an *'augafa'apae* (etymologically: 'the trans-generational line of the foundations of the title's stem house'), or, more commonly *tāupou*. The word *āūgā* conveys the notion of a flow or steady stream (Milner 1966: 29), as in "the years drifting by" or "the succession of *matai* bearing this name" (*o le āūgāmatai* or the word *āūgānofo* mentioned above); *pae* means the house foundations; the (abutting stone) foundation height is a direct and regulated sign of a family title's rank in the village circle. As for the word *tāupou*, etymology is now well established. The literature on Sāmoa regularly mentions "ancient Sāmoa's ceremonial virgins" or *tāupou*. (Mead misspelt the word as *taupo* (1928) as did Keesing (1937). The word *tāupou* actually designated any unmarried woman—and therefore supposedly virgin: the etymology is 'pertaining to a new state' *tau-fou* (Pawley 1982, Tcherkezoff 2008c: 106), someone who is no longer in her adolescence (at which time the word indicating that she was a virgin would have been *muli* or 'recent, new or not yet mature', which would have been added to *teine*, girl).

When these girls married (usually by political arrangements), another *'augafa'apae* was chosen. However, after marriage a *sa'otama'ita'i* used to keep her female ancestor's name and receive the deference due to it. What was probably the most important *tama'ita'i* role, that of chaperoning the *'augafa'apae*, has disappeared, as the last ceremonial virgins were invested in the 1920s.

When English-speaking Sāmoans explain the cultural identity of a *tama'ita'i* to a foreigner, they make a significant distinction by saying that the *tama'ita'i* is 'not a woman, but a lady'. Sāmoans say that, to them, the English word "woman" corresponds to *fafine*, as does the term "female". The Sāmoan word *fafine* can be used for a female animal (preceded by the name of the animal species) or in certain circumstances for a woman, but not politely, when her only social definition is as a wife (especially a *de facto* wife) of a untitled man. Nowadays, the role of *tama'ita'i* is mainly ceremonial, but in village events, the *tama'ita'i* of the leading family or families are usually respectfully acknowledged with the use of *sa'otama'ita'i* names. The *tama'ita'i* group is a *nu'u*. Individually each woman is a 'lady' of her, and collectively they are *o le nu'u o tama'ita'i*. When the ladies meet, they sit in a circle that follows the hierarchy of the chief circles, as each lady is a 'daughter' or 'sister' of a *matai*. Another term for the group is *āualuma*. It may refer to the notion of a 'group' (*au*) being 'put forward' (*luma*). In that case, it may have referred to the ceremonial context where the *tama'ita'i* were always the front group of the collective dances offered to visitors and/or to the more dramatic context of front line in ancient wars, as already evoked for the etymology of the word itself *tama'ita'i*.

An important distinction is made between a daughter of the village and the woman marrying in from outside. Whenever there is some ambiguity or dispute, Sāmoans may mention this distinction: "Who do you think you are talking like that? You're not a *tama'ita'i*." Although ceremonial virgins are no longer invested, expressions are still used today that indicate that the concept is still ideologically relevant and that all single women of a village have a responsibility towards the village. If an unmarried single woman commits the error of allowing herself to be seduced before marriage and cannot keep it a secret (if the boy brags about it or she falls pregnant), she may be accused of bringing shame not only on the family but the whole village. By 'falling', she is said to have "taken off one of the feathers from the virgin's fine mat" (an expression used by an older informant). The fine mats, Sāmoa's greatest treasures (Schoeffel 1999, Tcherkezoff 2002, 2012, nd.) are decorated on their edges with red feathers that most probably represent the blood that was publicly spilled at

defloration, which was the high point of a traditional wedding, as still witnessed around the 1920s. It is known how premarital virginity for a family's daughters is still considered important by Sāmoans. This value may be linked to the ancient beliefs that it was a condition for perpetuating the family name. The "seat of life" was believed to be in a woman's blood and there was the fear of the loss of these powers if the blood of the "first break" were not properly cared for in traditional marriages (see Krämer 1902, vol. I: 36; and Tcherkezoff 2003a: 346–411; 2013: 58–60; 2016: 266–287).

When referring to the ladies' circle, Sāmoans say, "The *tama'ita'i* are our village daughters (*teine o le nu'u*)". The word *teine* generally means young unmarried woman. If the speaker chooses to specify that she is a virgin, he or she will say *teine muli*, or *tāupou*, if she is older. If a person wishes to state unambiguously that a woman of any age has lost her virginity, whether legitimately or not, he or she may use the term *fafine*. Calling a woman *fafine*, when she is known as a *tama'ita'i* in the area, is a very grievous insult. If she remains single, she will no longer be *teine* but, after some time, *tama'ita'i*. However older women may also be addressed as *teine* in their own families, in an affectionate tone. Further, in contemporary usage in non-village contexts, all women may be formally referred to as "*tama'ita'i*", in order to avoid the issue of their marital status.

Another statement relevant to this investigation is: "The *tama'ita'i* are the *feagaiga*". *Feagaiga* refers to both the brother/sister relationship and to the sisters themselves in any family. However, the term is most specifically applied to the relationship between names that have become titles and belonged to a male ancestor and his sister respectively. In honorific language it is used for all the family's daughters. The chief will say to them, "You are the *feagaiga* and should behave accordingly". This opens up a wide scope for observing women's ceremonial role in the *'āiga* insofar as it is linked with perpetuating founding names, and with old traditions of brother-and-sister avoidance, as well as the traditional value attached to premarital virginity. There is also the distinction between, for example, *tamatāne* descendants (of both sexes) of the brother or son of a referenced ancestor, and *tamafafine* descendants (of both sexes) of a sister or daughter of this ancestor; collectively the *tamafafine* may be referred to as *feagaiga*. This intrafamily concept extends to village level. Thus, if a chief speaks about the ladies of the village, he may say, "They are our *feagaiga*, they are the village's *feagaiga*" (Aiono ms.2: 2). In other words, the ladies' circle includes the 'sisters' of all the 'brother/sister relationships' that define each family within the village.

Stories about decisions regarding the succession in a great family of the chief title in the 1930s indicate that whilst the 'brother-side' members (*tamatāne*) are responsible for presenting candidates, the role of 'sister-side' members (*tamafafine* or *feagaiga* among whom women bearing *sa'otama'ita'i* titles hold most authority) is to ease tensions caused by rivalry between the various brother-side branches and to hint at the best choice (as the sister side is thought to have mystical communication with the origin and to 'know' what is the best choice). According to Aiono (ms.3), there is a specific expression for this pacifying role: "to iron smooth" (*pae ma le 'āuli*), referring to the power ascribed to the *tama'ita'i* to make peace in the family or the *'āiga* as a whole, or within and between villages. The expression conveys the notion of "smoothing out" probably in reference to pressing the newly made fine mat with flat and heavy shells or stones, and, since the 19th century, pressing with another heavy tool that had a large flat side: the missionary introduced iron (for ironing clothes, called *auli*); see also Latai (2014: 304) who was told in Sāmoa that it means "the shell and the iron" and that *pae* "was a particular shell used by women to straighten the bark of the mulberry plant before it is used for the making of *siapo*". In my time (that is since the early 1980s), I

have not come across any instances of a *tama'ita'i* playing this sort of collective role in a village's internal disputes. In all cases observed that went beyond one extended family *aīga*, it was the chiefs *matai* who restored peace between quarrelling families.

There is a term for an outstanding *teine* or *tama'ita'i*, which may be applied to her because of her graceful dancing at ceremonies, but also connoting beauty—*tausala*. According to Aiono (ms. 3), the etymology is to be understood as the “lady who bears [the risk of] the fault and punishment”. The word *sala* means “fault” or “punishment” and implies the notion of the risk of losing virginity. In relation to that, Aiono (*ibid.*) mentions the old practice that we already evoked: when there were still wars between districts, a conquering side intending to destroy those defeated would face their virgin *sa'otama'ita'i* referred to as their *tausala*, who would stand in the front line, perhaps to be taken as wives by the victors, who might then spare the village (see also Freeman 1983). Aiono specified, however, that only *tausala* could do this, as the enemy would only accept virgins, adding (personal communication, 1994) that, comparatively, the status of *tausala* is to be understood as “worthy of sacrifice”.

We have mentioned the value of premarital virginity for a family's daughters. If a girl loses her virginal reputation, her *'aīga* is thereby shamed, particularly if it has a “great” name, or is the family of a church minister. As previously pointed out, the same attitude prevails at village level; it is thus easy to see links between a lady or girl's *feagaiga* status as sister in her family and the *feagaiga* status of the *tama'ita'i* in the village. As the “sisters” of the village they are expected to uphold its dignity. As sisters to all the men in the village, marrying within the village would be the height of unseemliness.

The Status of Wives

As noted previously, the circle of *tama'ita'i*, unlike the circle of the *taulele'a*, never admits women who marry into the village. As previously discussed, untitled male affines are admitted to the servers' circle, and male affines who are *matai*, to the chiefs' circle. The sub-group within the women's committee comprising the wives of *matai*, the *faletua ma tausī*, bears comparison to groups previously discussed, as well as differences. In terms of similarities, when these women gather in a circle, as do other groups, the hierarchy of the circle of *matai* is faithfully reproduced. But the differences outweigh the similarities. First, the sub-group is restricted to wives of *matai*. Second, they are not referred to as a *nu'u*, as is the case with the *matai*, the *taulele'a*, and the *tama'ita'i*. The fact that the group exists and bears a different name shows that female in-laws are not treated like male in-laws. Far from being integrated like the men, these women form a separate group. The name *faletua ma tausī* itself lacks unity, as the group is made up of two status groups. The *faletua* are the wives of *ali'i*, while *tausī* are the wives of the *tulāfale* order. Finally, some very great *ali'i* are entitled to specific honorific formulae and their wives are ceremonially known by a third term (*masiōfo*).

The *faletua ma tausī* bear a name that entirely derives from the husbands' status rather than a village status. Let us also immediately note that the group does not represent all the village wives, as it excludes the wives of the *taulele'a*. There is no such group (a circle of all the wives) that would function as such. Wives of untitled men can only be referred to by their affinal status—o *āvā a taulele'a*. The term *āvā* is the ordinary word for ‘wife’ (without any status marking), and would be offensive if used in speaking about a chief's wife. They do not have any ceremonial or other names

denoting their status as an established group and so there is no concept of their constituting a *nu'u* (particularly as even the chiefs' wives' group does not make up itself a *nu'u*). With regard to their tasks, in addition to the work they do in their husbands' families, they occasionally accompany their husbands to prepare food for village meetings.

Setting aside the difference between chiefs' wives who make up a group and non-chiefs' wives who do not, the common feature shared by all wives—that of not being a *nu'u*—is the individual name that applies to them. The villagers refer to them as 'our *nofotāne*' (from *nofo*, stay, live, and *tāne*, man, husband). They are women who 'stay or live with their man'. They are their 'husbands' wives', and this relation of possession is clearly marked in the system of possessive markers. While most of the kinship terms require the "-o-" class possessive marker, indicating that the possessor is not the cause of the possession ('my mother' is *lo'u tinā*: *l'ou* 'my' applies to also to 'my land': the real possessor are only my ancestors), 'my wife' is *la'u āvā* (*lo'u/la'u* differentiation), as 'my' children, 'my' garden (in opposition to the whole family land), and any objects acquired.

Husbands marrying-in, on the other hand, are referred to by a term indicating what they did something—they sought to 'make a wife' (*faiāvā*) and therefore came to live with their wives (this term is always used to specify the uxori-local residence). The *faiāvā /nofotāne* ("wife-maker"/ "she who stays with her husband") asymmetry is also reinforced by the words that precede the terms, whether implicitly or explicitly. In the expression 'the *faiāvā* men of our village', the word *tamāloa* will be used for men: this word applies only to human males, men, and not to animals. However, when talking about the gender of 'the *nofotāne* women of our village', only the word *fafine* can be used (never the word 'ladies' *tama'ita'i*) and that word designates the female of humans as well as of animals. Through this distinction that arises from social organisation, in Sāmoa the word *fafine* (that occurs in all Polynesian languages to indicate female) necessarily includes the notion of sexuality. This is why all Sāmoans, whether men or women, agree that the term is 'impolite' or 'disrespectful' (*lē fa'aāloālo*). It not only contains the notion of wife (which is generally *āvā* or *nofotāne* when residence is specified) but also includes the idea of 'she is not-a-lady', a non-*tama'ita'i*. In contrast, the word *tamāloa*, for man, does not imply anything about status (chief or servant) and about residence (in his village or as in-law in his wife's village).

The vocabulary denoting kinship-by-marriage-and-residence conveys the same bias. First, the terms for men in their circles (*matai* or *taulele'a*) has nothing to do with their wives' statuses, whereas the term for married women precisely depends on their husbands' status. Second, the asymmetry in the wording of these terms reminds the hearer that the man came to his wife's village and 'made' something specific (a wife), whereas the woman who came to the man's village is simply 'she who stays in her husband's home' (*nofotāne*). Another instance of this asymmetry occurs in the language of the sexual act, known, from the male point of view as "doing", while the female partner is "touched, wounded, knocked..." and all kinds of similar metaphors (for an analysis of the Sāmoan vocabulary relating to sexual matters, see Tcherkezoff 2003: 302-336).

The latter instance of asymmetry needs to be offset by the fact, indicated by all older informants, that in earlier custom, it was usual for the woman to move to her husband's village, with the opposite being rather rare. It would seem that, today and for the last two generations, it is more a matter of convenience—and a cause of instability of residence. The choice is made in terms of the husband's hopes of receiving a title, the distance from town, and the status difference in the two

families' founding titles. There is a third option that is available to very few people, ie buying freehold land which is very limited and expensive, thus being independent from both families. Those able to live independently of family outside the village are usually members of the small, more affluent middle class.

So far the major asymmetry between the affinal status of men and women has been explained. A village is a *nu'u* and comprises three *nu'u* groups plus the wives. The husbands may be assimilated, but not the wives. The husbands blend into a system that refers to titles (either being a *matai* or as a *taule'ale'a* that is said to be 'the way to become a chief'). Wives are identified only in terms of their husbands. As detailed above, for villages, in a *nu'u*, there are *matai* some of whom are the embodiment of the deceased ancestors and the founders of the names given to the land. Then there are two *nu'u* that are ceremonially arranged on the lines of the first: first, the untitled men, who absorb male affines and, second, the daughters of the village (exclusively those born to the village's founding families, and excluding the wives married into these families). This three-part view is based on the importance attached in the investigation to the local categorisation applied to each group—that is, that it constitutes a *nu'u*.

It is now possible to compare this finding with Sāmoans' perception when asked how they would explain what is a "*nu'u*", without restricting the question to *nu'u* groups only, but by simply asking what there is in a village. The most common reply consisted of a listing of all sorts of groups. Usually *matai* were placed first, then the women's committee, or, if the informant was elderly or a village woman, the *tama'ita'i* circle, followed by the chiefs' wives (if it was a conversation with a married woman, the latter order was reversed), the circle of *taulele'a* and, finally, the various religious or sports groupings (congregations, new churches, the village choir, the sport teams).

In Aiono's analysis of the social organisation of a village (1984: 24, 1986: 104; ms. 2: 2) there are five groups—the chiefs, the ladies, the servers, the chiefs' wives and the village children, connected in a way that presents the village metaphorically as a single family. In her diagram, there are five circles with the chiefs' circle in the middle. The line joining this circle to each of the four others is commented as a "*faiātoto* or *faiāfa'asuli* link"—that is, a blood *toto* link *faiā* or the "position *faiā* of being *fa'a*—an heir *suli* (to the family's founding name)". Each of the four circles connected to the chiefs is defined by a relationship with the chiefs: the *tama'ita'i* are the chiefs' daughters, the *taule'ale'a* are the chiefs' sons, the *Faletua ma Tausi* are the chiefs' wives and the *tamaiti* are the chiefs' children. This is a significant view both in terms of the order followed and the intention of presenting the village as a single family. In fact, Aiono (ms.1: 2) has expressly stated in one of these five-circle presentations that "this is the 'Āīgapotopoto writ large in the *nu'u*": the first word means the *aīga* family when all members meet formally for an important decision (*potopoto* means 'to gather individuals or assemble'). The "one plus four" pattern can be reduced to three. In the past, at least according to Aiono (ms. 3) there were only three formal groups—the chiefs, ladies and servers. That corresponds to my observations of a village *nu'u* constituted of only 3 ceremonial groups *nu'u* or at least of three formal eating-together gathering (*to'ona'i*). It can then be further reduced to two, emphasising (Aiono ms.1: 2) that "the *Tama'ita'i* ... is the unit in the ideal social organisation that repeats the authoritative level of the *matai* group itself; the Sāmoans refer to the *nu'u* as having a *Nu'u o Tama'ita'i* and a *Nu'u o Matai*".

With this view reduced to two groups, we come back here to the misunderstanding in the literature already evoked about “a village of men” and “a village of women”. Aiono has previously stated (ms. 2: 2) that “the *Tama’ita’i* of the village occupy a place in the social system equal to that of the village *matai*”. The expression often used by Sāmoans, ‘the ladies’ village’ and the chiefs’ village (*nu’u o tama’ita’i ma nu’u o matai*), is often said in the reverse order: ‘*nu’u o tama’ita’i ma nu’u o ali’i*’, where ‘*ali’i*’ has replaced ‘*matai*’. This allows for an ambiguity—only to foreigners’ ears. The word *ali’i* or ‘chiefs’ can also be, since some decades, a polite way of referring to men in general in a speech or ceremonial address, as the English ‘Sir’. Similarly, the word *tama’ita’i* is used as the English ‘ladies’, when the female half of the humankind needs to be mentioned in public (as *fafine* is considered impolite and quite inappropriate for speeches because of its “non-virgin woman” connotation). This alone has led various observers to see in this expression the notion of a male/female division, joining with the Western bias that we mentioned several times, that of trying to view any society as, first of all, a grouping of “men and women”.

The summary picture that emerges shows Sāmoan politics based on a family model, with the ancestors made present in the chiefs, followed by their sons and daughters. It is essentially one of a world of consanguinity with an agnatic ideology (in the limited sense that any chief, whether man or woman, is “father” to the members of the family whose name he or she represents) that totally ignores affinity in the kinship system. Only the fathers and their sons and daughters are included. Bringing the fathers together in a single circle, however, suggests that all these sons and daughters are each other’s brothers and sisters. Significantly, when Aiono (ms. 3) emphasised, during a lecture, the importance of the relationship between the *matai* and *teine* or *tama’ita’i* within a village and when she was asked from the audience what the role of the circle of *taulele’a* was, she replied that “the *aumāga* were the brothers of the *tama’ita’i*”.

This brother/sister relationship is also at work between the chiefs and the ladies’ circle, as it is essentially the chiefs’ circle that symbolises the village and the chiefs say “the ladies are the village’s sisters *feagaiga*”. *Matai* chiefs are mostly men and, whether men or women are said to be their family’s fathers. All other men, whether younger or older in age, are their juniors in status terms. They do service for their chief and, through them, for the community. The relationship between the chiefs’ and servers’ circles is a father/son or older/younger brother relationship that supersedes age (an older man will say to a younger *matai*, “You are my older brother”). The ladies’ circle, however, includes both the daughters and sisters and other consanguinal kinswomen. A man owes respect to a woman of his *’āiga* and generation, especially to an older woman, as she is his *feagaiga*, or classificatory sister. A female blood relative, however, is supposed to have a special relationship with the origin (gods, founding ancestors), which used to be ritually condensed in the ceremonial virgin figures, but is more or less deemed to be the purview of all female kin (Schoeffel 1979). In a way, the *matai* owes respect to his sisters as *feagaiga*.

Something of this relationship is clearly at work in the collective relationship between the village chiefs and the village’s ladies (even if the ancient tales about the virgin ladies’ sacrifice in offering themselves to the enemy are no longer part of the collective consciousness) and the reduction of the village to the two first groups, the chiefs and the ladies, emphasises this. For example, if a *taule’ale’a* commits an offence, he is only fined and his family, and therefore his chief, pay the fine to the chiefs’ circle. If *tama’itai* loses her reputation for chastity the entire village may be put to shame.

Village Endogamy: Conclusions and Perspectives

Conclusion on the Enigma

What happens in a marriage between a man and woman from the same village? For the man, there are no consequences. If he is a *matai* in his own village, he will remain so, even if his marriage is criticised. If he is a *taule'ale'a* in his own village, he will also remain so. In both cases, the men will continue to belong to their own village circle of either the *matai*, or the *taulele'a*. For the woman the situation is different. Regardless of whether her husband is a *matai* or a *taule'ale'a*, she loses her honoured status as a *tama'ita'i* and will become the wife of a *matai* (a *tausī* or *faletua*) or the wife (*āvā*) of a *taule'ale'a*. In both cases, she becomes a *nofotāne*, one of the women who have come from outside 'to live with their men'. In both cases, she loses a fundamental part of her social identity in her village.

To illustrate the severity of this situation, there was a case involving a woman who was one of the country's last surviving ceremonial virgins within one of Sāmoa's great families. Through circumstances unknown to me, she married a *matai* of her own village and, despite her fame and previous status, was not admitted to the village's ladies' circle. She was reduced to staying at home for many years (until she divorced, for unrelated reasons, and re-joined the *tama'ita'i*—though without the same honour as before) and then spending much of her time away from home. She explained to me, forty years later, that as the highest ranking *tama'ita'i* and the first among them to bear a *sa'otama'ita'i* title, she would never have considered associating with women on a daily basis who were socially defined solely in terms of being *nofotāne*, 'she who stays with a man'. She had to either remain secluded in her house, or to leave. "You see," she said. "*Tama'ita'i* or *nofotāne*, you've got to choose and make sure you get it right."

Beyond the Enigma: Gender Asymmetry

I suggest that the cultural logic underlying expectations of village exogamy, and the censorious attitude to village endogamy lies in the gender asymmetry in relation to consanguinity and affinity. There is no dissonance between the status of "brother" and "husband". In his village a man will have his married life as well as the duties of a brother to his sisters and parents. In his wife's village, the man will be a husband who is also a quasi-younger brother. That is why, in the case of a marriage in his own village, the greater proximity that arises between his status as brother and as husband does not create logical and social contradictions for his status. In contrast, the roles of "sister" and "wife" are mutually exclusive. No women can hold these two roles at the same time in the same place.

This enormous difference between men who, in the same social unit, can be brother and husband, and women cannot be sister and wife, is to be put in relation to the difference (as viewed by all age and gender categories of Sāmoans) in relation to the threshold and transitions in sexuality. While there are no words, not even any notion, of male virginity (it is extremely difficult to make Sāmoans understand for instance the Old French notions of such male virginity: "*puceau*"), we know how heavy is the frontier, for Sāmoans girls, and how many 'heavy' (*mamāfa*) words are there to express that condition of being, or not being, virgin. In Old French, at least in words, there was a symmetry between boys and girls: "*puceau*" for boys, "*pucele*" for girls. In Sāmoa, there was and still is a total asymmetry.

Thus, when comparing Sāmoan social categories with Western-influenced concepts of gender, it is as though there are *three* genders in Sāmoa: men, women-as-sisters, and women-as-wives (not mentioning a fourth-and-fifth gender category, the transgender *fa'afāfine* and *fa'a(fā)tama*, see Schoeffel 2014, Tcherkezoff 2014). Therefore, when we consider the question of the status of women in Sāmoan society, the question of a woman's standing as either consanguinal kinswoman or an affine must be considered. Although there is historical evidence that women in Polynesia have, or once had, very high status and authority (see for example Gunson 1987; Schoeffel 1987), and that the bodies and sexuality of Polynesian women have been legendary objects of pride—and prey—for men (Tcherkezoff 2008c, 2009) the discussion of gender has been largely focussed on marriage and sexuality and thus affinity, rather than on, as in the case of Sāmoa, women's roles as sisters and consanguinal kinswomen. It is only when a woman takes a high-ranking chiefly title that she moves beyond these gender dichotomies (as long as she obeys the rules of and exogamy pertaining to her *'āīga* and *nu'u*). And there is certainly not such a secure place during adolescence, where every day the adolescent girl must evaluate if she will be seen as behaving as a "sister" or as a potential or actual marital partner to a man. Adolescent boys do not have such a dichotomy of identity constantly weighted on their mind. Thus, quite contrary to what Margaret Mead and others have written, for girls their coming of age in Sāmoa is anything but an easy social transformation, recently as well as in the distant past.

A woman who marries in her village takes on wife status and, because of that, loses her position as a daughter of the village. Despite this norm in Sāmoan social organisation, a village daughter will sometimes "fall" (*pa'ū*). Young men may secretly have their first sexual experiences in their neighbourhood and sometimes, even if rarely, with their own relatives. As we now know, they do not stand to lose as much by a marriage within their village as do girls, and their access to the various status categories is diminished. It is the girl that bears the brunt of the risk. And her upbringing, which is oriented towards her duties as a daughter of the family, and therefore, of the village (and until recently was devoid of any proper sexual knowledge) hardly prepares her to manage the dangers associated with the consequences of sexual desire. This makes her all the more likely to "fall".

More often than not, girls do not fall, but pay the price anyway. I knew two young women who, when they were teenagers, were bubbling over with zest for life, but had their lives more or less ruined when they were unable to marry the men they loved, as he was from the same village. Ten years later, one is married to another man and the other has been through a string of casual relationships with all the disgrace that entails in the village. They are fairly dejected and their homes often dogged by quarrels.

The village's symbolic 'family' configuration runs deep throughout the village, affecting each and every person. In one of the unhappy marriages mentioned above, the man the young girl could not marry was the pastor's son in her village, the child of an *'āīga* that was not even from the village. The trouble was that, ever since the first missionary arrived in Sāmoa, the ceremonial status of a pastor has been as the metaphorical "sister of the village" (*feagaiga*) and he is formally addressed as such. This remark leads to a whole development that cannot find its place here: the chief who welcomed the first missionary gave him the founding ceremonial role of "sister" of all the community of villages in his authority; see Aiono (1986), Tcherkezoff (2008a: 271–276); Latai (2015 [section "The Pastor as Feagaiga"], 2016: 35–53). Thus pastors, who are all Sāmoans today, are

therefore “like-sisters” to the whole community of villages in their care and are cherished and presented with numerous gifts by the villagers who treat them as they would their own sisters, i.e. they constantly do ‘service’ *tautua* to them. Not so long ago, the *tama’ita’i* often met in the pastor’s home and young unmarried ladies often slept there. The pastor’s son is therefore brother to all the village daughters twice over. Village chiefs only have sons and daughters; chiefs are “gods here below”; and God watches over the village through His pastor who is the village’s Sister. There is no place for marriage in such a setting. It must happen outside the village.

Past and Present (1980-2016)

As I said at the beginning of this paper, the whole analysis presented here tries to understand why intra-village marriage was unanimously rejected in the 1980s; occurrences existed, but they were embarrassing for everyone. That situation has very much evolved during the last thirty-five years.

When I discussed, in the initial part of this paper, the gender dimension in the *matai* position, I have insisted how much the old encompassing level of value of the *feagaiga*, the whole brother-sister relation complex, was fading away, how much it is often now misunderstood, and gradually replaced by a dualistic gender distinction in Western terms, where the only choices are equality or inequality between men and women. For the very same reasons, the distinction between village ladies as the daughters of the village and in-marrying wives is fading away, gradually leaving only “women’s role”, women’s committees, etc. As this sharp distinction is fading away, the harsh consequences for women in case of intra-village marriages are *ipso facto* gradually disappearing. Thus, more and more it is not such a problem for a woman to be at the same time a daughter of the village and a married woman into the village.

I did not make any specific enquiry on those new trends, and I will refer again to the recent survey already mentioned (Meleisea *et al.* 2015), complemented by personal communication that Dr Penelope Schoeffel was kind to share with me (September 2016). She told me that the survey team did not define intra-village marriage as one of their topic of studies, but inevitably, during interviews, the topic came up:

We did not ask the question about intra-village marriage in the quantitative survey of villages, but in most if not all of the 60 qualitative interviews with sui o le nu’u and suitama’ita’i, marriage within their village was mentioned as common nowadays. Of the 28 suitama’ita’i, 17 of them were born in the village, married to a matai of the village.

As the discussion we had, during the PIURN Congress (September 2016), was also on post marital residency patterns etc., Schoeffel also added a note which resonates with what has been said above, concerning the willingness of men to come and live in their wife’s village if that village is near town:

Susana Taua’s random survey of informal vendors in Apia (for her PHD thesis) found the majority of them were in uxorilocal (faiāvā) marriages. In a study of cocoa growers registered with MAF I did with Emele Meleisea-Ainu’u earlier this year, there were 450 male farmers and 60 female farmers registered for the program. Those farmers were from all over Sāmoa. The female farmers were the land owners (i.e. the actual cocoa planter was uxorilocal husband and in some cases a son).

(P. Schoeffel, personal communication, September 2016)

Today, the few sad stories that I heard in the 1980s of young women having their personal expectations ruined because of the “customary” rejection of intra-village marriage would not

happen. At the same time, women are facing new challenges. The respect *fa'aāloālo* that once was always due to them when they were in their 'sister' *feagaiga* role has often disappeared, and they have to fight their way in this new world of inequality of access to decision-making positions.

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In memory of Aiono Dr Fanaafi and Koke Aiono. This paper greatly benefited from conversations in (Western) Sāmoa, in the 1980s, with late Professor Aiono Dr Fanaafi Le Tagaloa and late School Inspector and Instructor of Sāmoan language Koke Aiono. My debt to my two *Feagaiga* is immense. It was drafted in French and a first translation done by the team of the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific, under the guidance of Elise Huffer, when there was a project (sponsored by the French Embassy) of publishing in English a series of French written articles on the Pacific. The project was never completed, but some translations were achieved in the meantime and I happened to be among the few left with that benefit. All my thanks to the IPS-USP team. From there, several years later, I drew a much abridged version (*Living Kinship in the Pacific*, C. Toren and S. Pauwels (eds), Oxford, Berghahn (2015), pp. 167–186), and a new enlarged version that included further developments on the village groups, on linguistic labelling of these groups and on gender relations issues in Sāmoa. I made a short presentation at the 2nd PIURN Congress held at the National University of Sāmoa (19–21 September 2016), convened by Professor Meleisea Leasiolagi Malama Meleisea, director of the Sāmoan Studies Centre, benefitting from the discussions with the colleagues and audience, and, from there, I offered to the Journal of that Centre the unpublished enlarged version, with addenda from our PIURN discussions. I am much indebted to Dr Penelope Schoeffel who edited this final version for the *Journal of Sāmoan Studies*.

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