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# **Flowers, Fale, Fanua and Fa'a Polynesia**

*Edited by Richard Bedford, Robyn Longhurst  
and Yvonne Underhill-Sem*



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## *INTRODUCTIONS*

### **Transformation of Domestic Environments: an Ignored Dimension of Transnational Communities**

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#### **Context for a workshop**

Transnational communities have become the focus of considerable attention in recent years as one of several manifestations of globalisation (see, for example, Castles and Davidson 2000, Cohen 1997, Spoonley 2001, van Heer 1998). UNESCO's Management of Social Transformations (MOST) programme has picked up the theme of transnationalism as a dimension of globalisation in several of its major international research networks. The Asia-Pacific Migration Research Network (APMRN), with its focus on processes of change in multicultural and multi-ethnic societies, has been encouraging research on four themes associated with international migration and social transformation (Bedford 2001). These are: the issue of migration and identity, the roles of migrant entrepreneurs and 'business migration', illegal migration, and the implications of migration for environmental transformation. This volume contains papers presented at a UNESCO-sponsored workshop exploring aspects of the latter theme.

Issues of migration and identity for Pacific peoples have been explored in a collection of essays entitled *Tangata O Te Moana Nui: The Evolving Identities of Pacific Peoples in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (Macpherson et al. 2001a). As the editors note in their introduction, this book:

... is about the diverse identities that result from the various experiences of being a Pacific person in the many places in which Pacific people are now found. It avoids the essentialising of elements of 'culture' and the suggestion that those who do not share all of these suffer from some degree of deprivation. Instead it celebrates this increasing diversity in given cultural identities as a demonstration of the creative responses to the increasingly diverse circumstances in which Pacific peoples have chosen to settle and live (Macpherson et al. 2001b: 13-14).

The papers commissioned for and presented at the UNESCO-sponsored workshop, "Flowers, fale, fanua and fa'a Polynesia" are all about 'diverse identities that result from the various experiences of being a Pacific person in the many places in which Pacific people are now found'. A distinctive focus for the papers was the implications of migration for environmental transformation in both the island homes and the 'homes abroad' for Pacific peoples. Following Hau'ofa's (1998: 401-402) generous definition of 'Pacific peoples', the workshop included presentations on New Zealand's Maori and pakeha (European descent) peoples as well as Samoans, Tongans and Cook Island Maori. For the latter groups, the implications of migration for environmental transformation were examined in both their island homes as well as in Aotearoa/New Zealand.



A decision was taken to focus attention on the domestic environment — houses, flower and vegetable gardens, and the land used for residential purposes. This was because the literature on transnational communities has tended to highlight cultural, economic, political and social dimensions of their structures and dynamics. Little attention has been given to the way in which domestic environments reflect ‘creative responses to the increasingly diverse circumstances in which Pacific peoples have chosen to live and settle’ (Macpherson et al. 2001b: 14). Yvonne Underhill-Sem, the co-ordinator of the workshop and of most of the research reported in the following papers, sums up the local context for the particular focus on domestic environments in her summary of the rationale for the study. She observes in the second part of the *Introductions* that the project examines aspects of place that have been taken-for-granted in Pacific Islands identities and economies — the domestic environments associated with residences and their associated flower and vegetable gardens in both island homes and homes abroad.

In essence the project represents a partial response to a challenge issued by Findlay and Hoy (2000), in a special issue of *Applied Geography*, for researchers with an interest in migration and social transformation to examine environmental issues and health problems amongst transnational communities. They point out that “Globalising tendencies suggest greater freedoms for some ethnic groups, not only in terms of their residential geographies, but more significantly in the flexibility of their negotiated identities” (Findlay and Hoy 2000: 212). Quoting Zelinsky and Lee (1998: 294) they go on to observe that:

... a substantial portion of those populations that have been crossing and re-crossing international boundaries ... are capable of retaining or reinventing much of the ancestral culture, while devising original amalgams of their cultural heritage with what they find awaiting them in their new, perhaps provisional, abodes.

These papers all demonstrate that ‘ancestral cultures’ are being reinvented in different ways in the residential environments of both ‘old’ and ‘new’ abodes for Pacific peoples who have a long history of ‘crossing and re-crossing international borders’. As Epeli Hau’ofa (1994: 156) reminds us in his evocative essay ‘Our Sea of Islands’:

... much of the welfare of ordinary people of Oceania depends on informal movement along ancient routes drawn in bloodlines invisible to the enforcers of the laws of confinement and regulated mobility ... [Pacific peoples] are once again enlarging their world, establishing new resource bases and expanding networks for circulation.

There is nothing new about transoceanic mobility amongst Pacific peoples. The Maori population of Aotearoa is descended from Polynesian seafarers, and the more recent waves of immigrants from the eastern Pacific have come to a land inhabited by their ancestral kin.

The physical environment of Aotearoa/New Zealand is very different from that found in their island homes. However, the knowledge that a Polynesian people has successfully lived in this different environment for over 1000 years has, no doubt, facilitated the adaptation process. As the papers by Ieti Lima and Robyn Longhurst in this volume show, some familiar signs of the tropical Pacific can be found in the gardens of Maori, pakeha and Pacific Island New Zealanders, especially those living in the North Island.

## Flowers, fale, fanua and fa'a Polynesia

The workshop organised by Underhill-Sem to report on the initial findings of the research into migration and the transformation of domestic environments in Pacific communities in the islands and abroad explored three key themes in the islands, and three in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The papers by Ruta Fiti-Sinclair, Asenati Liki and Yvonne Underhill-Sem all examined aspects of the changing roles of flowers in Samoan and Cook Island society. Flowers have always played an important role in the social life and identities of Polynesians but, as Fiti-Sinclair shows, there were some significant transformations in the ways flowers were used for personal decoration as well as in ceremonies and buildings following the establishment of Christianity in Samoa and other parts of the Pacific.

Fiti-Sinclair and Underhill-Sem both stress the importance of flowers in the construction of contemporary Pacific identities; part of the process of post-colonialism in Polynesia has been re-establishing the place of flowers in cultural and social life. This does not mean a return to practices of the past, however. As Underhill-Sem argues, the flowers and combinations of plant materials used for ceremonial and decorative purposes in the 1990s are often different from those used in the past reflecting the poly-ethnic character of contemporary Polynesian communities.

Liki's study of contemporary responses to commercial flower production opportunities in Samoa indicates that there is a new dimension to this post-colonial revival of interest in and the significance of flowers in Samoan life. Flowers are also a commercial proposition and a differentiated market in the production and consumption of flowers in Samoa is emerging. Most of the flowers for sale are still grown in domestic garden situations rather than nurseries of the kind that Longhurst discusses in her examination of sub-tropical gardening in New Zealand.

Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop and Wendy Cowling examine developments with regard to *fanua* and *fale* respectively in Samoa and Tonga. Fairbairn-Dunlop develops an argument about the trend towards acquisition of a quarter acre section of freehold land in Samoa, especially by migrants returning from New Zealand or Australia. The demand for freehold land, the title to which can be held by the family without reference to the *matai* (chiefs), is increasing rapidly, according to Fairbairn-Dunlop's research into land transactions in Apia in recent years. This trend reflects changing perceptions of the place of land in Samoan domestic environments, especially the domestic environments of Samoans who have lived for many years in rental and ownership property in New Zealand.

Cowling's examination of trends in housing styles in Tonga, and some of the environmental implications of the sorts of housing that the elites especially are building, reveals some interesting tensions within one of the most active Polynesian transnational communities. Tongan housing has been greatly transformed by styles imported from New Zealand especially and there is very little so called 'traditional' housing left in the country. Migration has had, and continues to have, a very profound impact on this dimension of Polynesian domestic environments. However, the movement of ideas is not all one-way. It is not just a question of importing overseas designs and kit-set houses into the islands. As Cluny Macpherson (1997) shows in a fascinating analysis of the way Samoans adjusted to urban living in New Zealand, the humble garage gained a whole range of new uses and meanings as its potential was realised for overcoming major space restraints in the small three-bedroomed State houses in Auckland.

Lima reports on an exploratory study of gardening amongst Samoans resident in Auckland. His case studies are drawn from several suburbs and he reveals considerable diversity in both the enthusiasm for and the realisation of domestic gardens in urban residential spaces. One of the major constraints facing would-be Samoan gardeners is the fact that the majority of Pacific peoples in Auckland still rent their houses. They are reluctant to invest much time or money in establishing gardens in places that are not their own. Where people have established gardens, Lima finds evidence of both considerable continuity in the choices of plants and the roles of flowers especially in Samoan social and cultural life, especially amongst older people. He also finds evidence of considerable change related to the impact of local climatic conditions on plant species as well as the impact of a wage economy on the division of labour in the gardens.

Longhurst's examination of domestic gardens "as texts that raise questions about migration, entanglements of culture, and constructions of diasporic identities" charts a brief history of colonial gardens in New Zealand, before describing current gardening trends in temperate New Zealand and exploring what the shift towards subtropical gardening might mean in relation to post-colonial identities and cultural difference. She focuses on the gardens of urban, middle class pakeha New Zealanders, and the extent to which they are taking elements of Pacific environments, filtering them through their own cultural experiences and building them into a new post-colonial identity.

In the final paper, Pania Melbourne brings the perspectives of a Maori researcher to bear on some issues that are of critical importance to the *tangata whenua* of Aotearoa in the contemporary contexts of commercialisation of indigenous plants and knowledge about plants. There is considerable interest both within Crown Research Institutes as well as within Maoridom in the possibilities for commercialisation of non-domesticated indigenous plants. However, the very different cultural values that underpin Maori society on the one hand, and the world of commerce that dominates the political and economic life of New Zealand's majority pakeha population, create complex situations both for researchers as well as for the actors seeking to test the commercial viability of particular propositions. Melbourne talks of the interplay of power between two different worlds, and how these worlds manage to co-exist.

While her discussion relates to a particular situation within Maoridom, the issues Melbourne raises about research into aspects of the use of plants within contemporary society has wider relevance for Pacific peoples in both their island homes and their homes abroad. The circulation of plant materials within the transnational networks of Pacific peoples is leading to new opportunities for domestic gardening in both the islands and in New Zealand. There have been no substantive studies of Pacific gardening in New Zealand cities, but it is clear from Lima's preliminary inquiries that the cultivation of vegetables, flowers and a range of plants with medicinal value is an integral part of Auckland's established Pacific communities, reflecting cultural values that remain important in the islands.

### **A final comment**

Research on the implications of migration for environmental transformation in Pacific transnational communities is still in its early stages. However, the original research reported at the Apia meeting, and detailed in the papers in this volume, has made it clear that "we must radically rethink the relationships between person, community, culture and place for all of us, not just for immigrants and ethnic groups" (Zelinsky and Lee 1998: 294) if we are to understand better the

development of transnational communities and their implications for social change and environmental transformation.

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## **Population Mobility and the Environment in Polynesia: New Perspectives on an Old Theme**

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Towards the end of the 1990s the study of population mobility in the eastern Pacific, Polynesia, as predominantly an economic issue has been superseded by studies which take population mobility as a given and examine its social and cultural complexity in various locations and using various texts (Macpherson 1999, Liki 1997). Detailed analysis of the flows and composition of people moving into, out of and through the countries of the eastern Pacific have shown that international migration is significant, complex and often contradictory (see Bedford 2000 and Connell 1977 for useful overviews). Different sorts of people are moving between different places for different reasons and for varying lengths of time. The cumulative effect of these complex mobility patterns increasingly constitutes the multi-local identities of many Pacific Islanders (Macpherson 1997, Ward 1997).

The extent to which various aspects of 'home' island cultures constitute Pacific Island identity becomes an important question in the context of globalisation (the compression of space and time in political, economic and cultural affairs) and post-coloniality (the politics of recognising and rejecting the cumulative impacts of colonial intrusion). Also interesting is the extent to which the cultures of 'metropolitan' places constitute Pacific Island identity (Anae 1998, Macpherson 1999, Underhill-Sem and Fitzgerald 1996).

Closely related to issues of cultural identity among mobile Pacific peoples is the recognition of 'the environment' as an essential part of Pacific Island identity and in particular the cultural importance of land. International debates on climate change and biodiversity have further emphasised the critical importance of Pacific Island environments and biodiversity not only for the islands themselves but also for global concerns.

This research project brings together issues of population mobility and environmental transformation in an exploratory analysis of how domestic environments are being constituted by the multi-local identities of mobile Pacific peoples. The initial focus was on Samoa but as the project unfolded, so too did other perspectives on the guiding questions. In the end we have papers on Samoa, Tonga, and New Zealand.

The initial focus on Samoa is in some ways accidental in that this was where the principle researcher, who self-identifies as a New Zealand Cook Islander, lived. However, perhaps because Samoans constitute the largest group of Polynesians in New Zealand and there are now many New Zealand-born Samoans, there have been a growing number of studies in New Zealand which examine the complex creation of Samoan identities (Anae 1998, Macpherson 1999, Macpherson et al., 2000). This study contributes to this analysis by examining aspects of place that have been taken-for-granted in Pacific Islands identities and economies — the feminine domestic activities associated with flower gardens in 'home islands'. This study could well have been located in the Cook Islands or Tonga and it is hoped that it can be expanded in this direction.

## Flowering identities and the domestic production

As Samoans have moved through the Pacific and beyond, so too have ideas, fashions and money, making for an increasingly diverse Samoa — not that it was ever as homogenous as it was thought to be. Flowers have always been a feature of Pacific Island identity and culture and appear in many Pacific motifs such as on Cook Island *tivaevae* (quilts), contemporary art, and clothing styles. Flowers are used extensively for church displays, greetings, meetings, funerals and weddings. The underlying message is that flowers are an integral part of Pacific identity and are ‘naturally’ part of Pacific environments.

Recent developments highlight some ways in which this is changing. Artificial flowers and ‘lolly leis’ are becoming more common in New Zealand, Samoa, Tonga and the Cook Islands. At the same time, there has been a notable increase in the development of small businesses in Samoa, which grow and sell flowers and plants, both native and introduced varieties. Now in the late 1990s, *palagi* (European) flower displays have an acceptable and even privileged place in these same contexts.

It is not only as part of Pacific identities within which flower motifs emerge. The combination of climate and soil in the physical environment provides for the growth of lush and ‘exotic’ tropical flowers. To date, much flower production is for the local market. In the case of Fiji this extends to the larger tourist market. However, fragrant plants and flowers have moved, both commercially and privately, throughout the region for many years. For example *mairé* leaves from Mauke, in the Cook Islands, are sold in Hawaii and *tipani* (frangipani) have been air-freighted from Rarotonga, the Cook Islands to Porirua, New Zealand for weddings.

In the context of new global trade developments, the ability of Pacific Island floriculture businesses to flourish must be understood in the context of complex issues arising from the Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement *vis a vis* the Convention on Biological Diversity. Already, in the Caribbean the floriculture industry has developed in response to demands from markets outside the region, which has altered the landscape in the Caribbean as well as set up another island industry too closely tied to non-Caribbean commercial interests.

Domestic gardens are built and developed on the basis of the multiple needs of owners and according to diverse ideas about design. In this way, gardens in Samoa can be examined for the ways in which they constitute and in turn are constituted by the people who design and build them. Flower gardens are one area of the domestic environment, which is clearly in the domain of women. It is predominantly women who are involved in flower gardens or the planting and tending of ornamental and fragrant plants. Among other things it is widely thought that tending domestic flower gardens enables women to stay close to home where they remain under surveillance and can still attend to the care of children, the aged and the sick.

There is also however an emotive aspect to tending domestic gardens: pride in the extent, tidiness and diversity of gardens; pleasure in watching gardens develop; delight in unexpected growth; satisfaction in sharing the garden and what it delivers. The pleasure of being able to use one’s flowers for gifting to other people, for church decorations and other life cycle events like weddings and funerals, tends to be underestimated. Over the last decade in Samoa however, there appears to have been an appreciable change in the way domestic flowers are being used in Samoa. Aspects of competition and commercialism are becoming evident. Neighbours and

family members are less keen to share particular plants and cut flowers are now being sold for different events. This exploratory research began to examine these changes by asking the following questions:

- What is the 'place' of domestic flower gardens in Polynesia?
- In what ways does the movement of people into and out of Polynesia affect domestic and commercial flower gardens?
- In what ways are flower gardens gendered?
- In what ways do flower gardens contribute to the recreation of Pacific places and identities?

These questions open up another dimension to the population mobility-environment nexus. Stimulated by these questions, the research that follows shows the intellectual potency of interrogating domestic sites and taken-for-granted activities among the highly mobile Polynesian populations. Surprises and contradictions resonate through the work reported here thereby fueling further inquiries into the population mobility-environment nexus in the Pacific.

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## ***FROM SAMOA ... TO THE COOK ISLANDS ... TO TONGA***

### **Flowers and the Church in Samoa**

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#### **Introduction**

This paper is about the ways flowers have been and are used in the Church in Samoa. The argument is presented in four parts. First, I situate myself in this research project. Second, I situate my research in relation to historical material. Third, I discuss the use of flowers for body adornment and the church in Samoa. Finally, I discuss the use of flowers to decorate the church building.

#### **Situating myself**

In situating myself in this project, I introduce myself and tell you how I think I fit into a project on Population Mobility and Environmental Transformation in Polynesia. I spent my childhood and early adult life in Samoa in the 1940s and 1950s. I went for further education for five years in New Zealand in the early 1960s, came back at the end of 1966 and then left at the end of 1969. I was away for 29 years. All those years I lived in Papua New Guinea, but I came with my family to visit Samoa some six times before returning for good in May 1999. While living in PNG, my family and I travelled many times to Australia, New Zealand and Fiji as well as many countries in Europe, Middle East, Asia and the Americas. I have been a mobile Polynesian.

I did further studies while I was raising my family and then taught at the University of Papua New Guinea for over ten years. I wrote a History Honours Thesis on the Samoan missionaries who started work along the Papuan coast in the 1880s. A few of these *faiife'au* were still in PNG when I went there in 1970. I looked at the contribution of the *faiife'au* and their wives, and their influence on the lives of the Papuans. This group of migrant Polynesians may be worth further studies. I do not know if they took flowering plants with them, but they certainly took breadfruit and bananas. There is a variety of breadfruit which is referred to by the Papuans as Samoan breadfruit and there is also a Samoan banana.

I have always been a keen gardener and planted vegetables and flowers at all the places I lived in PNG. The thing I have always planned to do in my retirement is to be a gardener, growing vegetables and ornamental plants. So, when I heard about this research project, I was interested. After talking with the organiser, we decided that my memories while growing up here, and my observations during my visits, would be useful material for the project. This was especially the case because the biggest changes in flowers in Samoa have occurred since the 1960s and I was in a good position to notice the changes as my visits were spaced out over the subsequent 29 years.

## An historical overview

The three main changes about flowers I noticed in Samoa during my visits during the past 29 years, and since I've been back are:

- a) The enormous increase in the number of different new ornamental plants and flowers in people's gardens.
- b) How much more beautiful villages are in both Savai'i and Upolu because of their colourful gardens and hedges.
- c) The beautiful floral arrangements now used to decorate venues for meetings, weddings and other celebrations as well as for funerals.

Although my comments today will be based on my memories and observations, I consulted a number of people to check the validity of my knowledge. I acknowledge these people as I develop my discussion.

I decided to review flowers and the church in Samoa, because of a comment by Kramer (1995) in a section called 'Ornaments and Types of Dress', in the second volume of his work *The Samoa Islands*, first published in German in 1903 and translated into English in 1995: "There is no ornament more beautiful than one fashioned of flowers and leaves, such as probably best developed on the South Sea Islands". As he goes on to observe, it is all the more painful therefore to read as far back as the 1840s that the missionary teachers discouraged the use of flowers as ornaments.

There are two themes I develop in this review of 'Flowers and the Church in Samoa'. One is the use of flowers for body decorations in the church and the second is the use of flowers for decorating the church buildings. Before I talk on flowers and the church in Samoa, I want to talk briefly about the first of the three main changes I mentioned earlier — the enormous increase in the number of different new ornamental plants and flowers in people's gardens.

In the same section of Kramer quoted earlier, he went on to describe the various plants, leaves and flowers which were used for *ula*, *pale* and *sei*. Kramer says that *ula*, red, is the Samoan's favourite colour and that is how the necklace got its name, for it is fashioned mainly from the red Pandanus beans or the red shells of the *polovao* berries. Kramer said the *polovao* was lauded as *tuive'eve'e* or *tuiveve*. He also commented that the red rusty tiny *laga'ali* blossom which bloom in clusters, is almost as durable as the *ulafala* and the *ulapolovao*.

I now list the flowers he described as being used to make *ula*. The ones I have marked with an \* are the ones that I know and are still popular today. The rest I either don't know the plant or I have not seen it being used for making *pale* or *ula*.

- \* The red Hibiscus flower (*aute*)
- \* The white *pua* blossoms of lovely fragrance (Frangipani)
- \* The more fragrant blossoms of *moso'oi*, the Cananga odorant (Ylang-Ylang)  
Nightshade, Solanum sp. (*polovao*)
- \* Rusty red *laga'ali* blossoms, *Aglaia edulis*  
Blossoms of *pualulu*
- \* Ever so fragrant Hoya umbels (*fuesa*)
- \* Lovely *suni*, *Phaleria* sp.

*Usi*, *Evodia* sp.  
Blossoms of the *talie* tree, *Terminalia*

He also mentioned that some flowers of the white man, especially the rose (the *losa*) and the *susana*, were also incorporated into the making of *ula*. Apart from flowers, Kramer also mentioned other plant parts used to make *ula*.

\**ulafala*, Red Pandanus beans  
\**laumaile*, *Saperula* sp.  
red *polovao* berries  
\*fruit of the *seasea*  
red pods of the *Capsicum*  
\* red peas of the '*la'aulopa*, Job's tears  
*sanusanu*, *Coix Lacryma*  
fragrant ferns  
wild zingiber *avapui*.

He also described a number of different shells used for making *ula*, but they are not in the scope of this discussion.

Looking at this list of plant parts used for *ula*, the one very popular *ula* of today and of my childhood, which is very conspicuous by its absence here, is that made from the *teuila*. The red *teuila* was in recent years adopted by the Samoan Tourism Authority as the national flower of Samoa. So I now ask 'when was the *teuila* brought to Samoa, if it was not here during the late 1800s?' Or was it here but just not used for making *ula*? The red *teuila* was certainly here and used for making *ula* during my childhood.

Two weeks ago my husband took some friends from overseas to the Robert Louis Stevenson museum at Vailima. When he returned he told me the story of the origin of the name *teuila*, as it was told to the tourists by the museum tour guide. I checked this story at the museum. The story is that Mrs Fanny Stevenson admired the floral arrangements the Samoan women used to put around the Stevenson's residence, and she asked what they were called. The Samoan women told Mrs Stevenson that they were called *teu'i'ila*. Mrs Stevenson could not pronounce this properly, she could only say *teuila*. So, the tour guide tells the tourists 'that is how we name our national flower – *teuila*'. This explanation does not account for the fact that the same flower is also called *teuila* in Tonga, and *keuila* in Niue. *Teuila* is a species of ginger and some argue that all are of European introduction.

The male tour guide who was there when my husband and friends were there, went on to add that the *teuila* flowers was actually originally called the *avapui*. Apparently, this information comes from a song sung by the people of Salani village at the *Teuila* Festival song competition in 1999. According to one source this song said that the *teuila* was called *avapui*. Now, the *avapui* is mentioned by Kramer, but he mentioned it not as a flower, but in the list of leaves to adorn themselves as wild zingiber *avapui*. Another explanation of the name *teuila* that I have been given is *teu*, which means to decorate or make beautiful, and *ila* is a blemish, so *teuila* is to cover up or make beautiful something that was not so beautiful.

Kramer (1995 vol II: 317) went on to observe that "Unfortunately Samoa does not abound in blossoms and its people often have to be satisfied with leaves to adorn themselves". I would like

to confirm this as being true when I was a child, but it is certainly not the situation today. Samoa very much abounds in blossoms today, and this is a change that I have noticed in the last two or three decades. The small number of flowers that were in Samoa during my childhood are still around, but very much overshadowed by the many more recently introduced flowers.

### **Flowers and the church in Samoa**

I now want to talk about flowers as used for body decorations in the church. The question I was asked by the organiser of the workshop to look at is: what was the ‘place of flowers’ in the past, and how is this changing? To find out about the place of flowers in the past, I started in the Nelson Memorial Public Library. These are quotes from writings about Samoa in the 1800s and early 1900s that I obtained from various photocopied articles, the full sources of which I cannot cite as such details were not available.

On all such occasions they make themselves gorgeous with flowers stuck in the hair and ears, ferns and flower wreaths about the neck, and with shell, seed, and pod necklaces (Hood 1922).

Boys and girls, young and old, making a festive display, their persons anointed with coconut oil and arrayed in scanty toilets of leaves and flowers (Whitaker 1889).

Their handsome brown bodies glisten with coconut oil ... their hair is decorated with shells and white and scarlet flowers (Wagner n.d.).

Her picture shows to what decorative use are put the creamy white, yellow-hearted blossoms of the frangipani (Churchill 1899).

There is no ornament more beautiful than one fashioned of flowers and leaves, such as probably best developed on the South Sea Islands. It is all the more painful therefore to read as far back as Wilkes II, p. 141 “but the use of flowers as ornaments has been interdicted by the missionary teachers”. Fortunately that prohibition had as little success in Samoa as the one against tattooing (Kramer 1995).

The quotes raise many issues but it is the last quote by Kramer (who quotes Wilkes) that made me decide to write about flowers and the church in Samoa.

Firstly, it is not clear if Wilkes was talking about *palagi* missionaries or Samoans who had become missionary teachers. Secondly he does not say to which denominations these missionary teachers belonged. I come from a long line and tradition of the London Missionary Society (LMS) — now the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS)/Ekelesia Fa’apopotonga Kerisione o Samoa (EFKS). I had a *faiife’au* (pastor) grandfather with whom I spent all my long school holidays, and my father was also a *faiife’au*. During my childhood I went to church twice every Sunday and I attended *faiife’au* school after government primary school every weekday. I learnt to read in Samoan in a *faiife’au* school, before I learnt to read in English, and I learnt my times tables and basic arithmetic and also basic geography and history in the *faiife’au* school.

A very strong LMS value I grew up with is that nobody wears a *ula*, *pale* or *sei* to church. These are considered provocative and therefore worldly and even sinful if worn to church. In fact, as a child, I was not encouraged to wear these, even outside church. White Sunday or Children’s

Sunday, in my childhood was observed only by the LMS, and I think the Methodists, unlike now when all churches in Samoa observe White Sunday. It was only on White Sundays then that some children wore *pale* (head crown) made of white frangipani flowers. And the church was decorated with *fatu* also made of white frangipani and *lautagitagi*.

I think the prohibition mentioned by Wilkes was enforced because body decorations made with flowers were seen by missionaries as part of the pagan Samoan customs. Samoan dancing was prohibited because it was thought to be sexually stimulating and ended up in young men and women going off to the bush to have sex outside of the sanction of marriage. *Ula, sei* and *pale* were ornaments which Samoans donned for festivities which involved dancing and other pagan habits. I believe that is why flowers were forbidden to be worn in church, and that is why by the time I grew up, which was over 100 years after the LMS church was established, I absorbed this prohibition as an important value.

Over the years while I was away and came back for short visits, I noticed that this was changing. For example, when I was shown photos of my relatives with their children taken on White Sundays, I noticed that it was not just the *pale*, but children and some parents who were wearing *ula* and *sei*. Last year, when I went to church on Mothers' Day, I saw mothers, fathers and children all wearing flowers. On the television as well, a lot of congregations were shown wearing *ula, pale* and *sei* during church services.

When I checked some of my ideas with Filifilia Tamasese, an early childhood friend (she and I used to go to *faiife'au* school together), she said that what I saw on TV was mainly the Catholics. She said that that there has not been so much change with the CCCS/EFKS. I therefore decided to talk with some church people to see what the current positions of the churches are on the wearing of flowers. I talked to Rev Oka Fauofo and his wife So'o. Rev Fauofo is the President of the EFKS and also the President of the Council of Churches in Samoa. I also talked with Father Nimo Pilimai, the Vicar General of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Samoa.

Rev Fauofo and his wife So'o are in the same denomination that I grew up in, and they are over ten years older than me. They concurred that wearing *ula* and *sei* was also sinful in their minds. But times have changed and that idea is not so strong now. In Polynesia today, a *ula* is used to greet people, especially important guests. I wonder how far back in history this custom goes? There is no mention of this in any of the early sources I consulted. However, Oka says when he is invited to open a meeting or building and he is given a *ula*, he will wear it, until he conducts the service. He then removes the *ula* and puts it back on after the service.

He told me that at a recent meeting of the *faiife'au toeaia*, who make up the highest decision-making body of the EFKS, there was a resolution to advise the *faiife'au* not to wear *ula* while conducting such services, as it has been noticed that some of the younger *faiife'au* are wearing *ula* while conducting a service or saying a prayer. Oka told me there is no church law as such, but these are the things handed down by the missionaries. He personally sees nothing wrong with it, but he still will not wear a *ula* while doing a prayer or conducting a service, even when it is not in a church. Oka was the principal of the Malua Theological College for a number of years.

So'o's father, Faleto'ese, was also a principal of the same theological college. She was also a teacher at Papauta school, the LMS/CCCS school which prepares girls to be wives for the students trained to be *faiife'au* at Malua Theological College. On talking about missionaries prohibiting the wearing of flowers, she said it was a personal matter. She said some missionaries did not prohibit it. In fact, she said that the woman missionary who founded Papauta, Miss

Downes, had the Papauta girls wear the red *aute* or *sei* as part of their uniform. Papauta girls wore this uniform for many years. However, she agreed with Oka and myself that wearing of flowers on the body was just not done in church. Even now, she will not wear a *ula* or *sei* inside a church.

When I spoke with Father Nimo Pilimai of the Catholic Church, he said no flower was ever worn in a Catholic Church in Samoa until the 1970s. 1970 was the year of Vatican Two. This was when it was decided that Latin would no longer be the only language of worship. Indigenous languages and customs were allowed for worship. So it is only since then that the Catholic Church in Samoa began to incorporate elements of Samoan culture into their worship. Wearing *ula*, *sei* and *pale* is part of the Samoan culture, so it is now considered fitting to wear these during worship. Father Nimo, however, commented that it took some years before people began to feel comfortable with this, and he also said that there are other elements of Samoan culture which a number of Samoan Catholics still do not want incorporated into the worship services.

### **Flowers to decorate the church building**

The missionaries may have prohibited the use of flowers as body decorations but they encouraged planting flower gardens and using flowers to decorate houses and churches. Flower gardening and using bouquets of flowers to decorate houses is part of the culture the missionaries brought with them from their home countries. As a child, the only houses where I saw bouquets of flowers were houses of *palagi*, including missionaries or Samoans connected to missionaries, like the *faiife'au* or of the *afakasi* (part Europeans). There were also two bouquets, one on each side of the pulpit in the church, and we also used to have one on the teacher's table at primary school. It was a job of the girl class monitor to pick hibiscus on her way to school in the morning to decorate the teacher's table.

In each of the two villages that I used to go to as a child, the only house which had some form of flower garden was the pastor's house. The most common flowering plants in each of these two villages were *aute* (hibiscus, but only a few varieties), red *teuila*, a ginger, and *pua* (frangipani). There were some *pua tausaga* (gardenia) and *pua taunofo* (alemanda). All these I thought of as Samoan flowers. There were also some *palagi* flowers such as marigolds, zinnias, hydrangeas, a white lily, and roses, scattered, a few in front of some of the houses, but nothing like they are in most villages today.

*Moso'oi*, *laumaile* and *seasea*, which were used for making *ula*, were bush plants, which people went to the bush and their gardens behind the villages to pick when needed. Very few people, if any, planted these next to their homes. In all the books I used as references for the use of flowers, there was no mention of flowers being used to decorate Samoan *fale*, (houses).

When I was a child, it was only on special occasions such as at weddings, the opening of new buildings or the welcoming of important visitors, that I saw houses being decorated with leaves and flowers. The exception to this were the village *fale komiti* (committee houses) which always had *teu* (bouquet) of *aute* (hibiscus) or *pua* (frangipani) on *tuaniu* (rib of coconut leaf). The main way to decorate houses for festivities in those days was to plait the posts with coconut leaves, with some red hibiscus or frangipanis stuck on the coconut leaves. *Fatu* of *lautagitagi* leaves, frangipani flowers or *laugasese* were strung between house posts and along the blinds of the *fale*. Hibiscus and frangipani flowers were also strung on coconut leaf ribs, or on the tips of vine shrub

branches, and stuck in a tin or jam jar of sand. These were put either in the front of the house or on a table if there was one. However, as none of these were mentioned by any of the earlier writers, I wonder if these were not Samoan innovations to decorate houses as suggested by the missionaries.

The two bouquets of flowers on either side of the pulpit of the CCCS churches of my childhood were sometimes alternated with bouquets of home-made crepe paper flowers, and later, when plastic flowers were available commercially, these became popular for decorating churches. This is still the case in some of the villages. When I asked the wife of the *matai* (chief) of my family in my village in Falealili about flowers in the church there, she said that they use real flowers only on special occasions (*aso fa'apitoa*), such as when they have a *faiife'au* from another village, or a theological student, come to take the service,. She proudly said that they have a lot of artificial flowers which they use most Sundays. Most of these were donated by village members who live overseas. I have seen these flowers stored in a big glass cabinet in a room alongside the pulpit.

I was told that the USP Centre at Alafua, and the Samoa Polytechnic at Vaivase have run short courses in floral arrangements and in flower gardening. The Ministry of Women Affairs and the Komiti Tumama, have also run similar courses in a number of villages, both in Savai'i and Upolu. They, together with the Samoa Tourism Authority, also encourage the planting of crotons and other colourful leaves and flower gardens in villages, as part of the beautification programme.

These courses all used mainly the newly introduced flowers, but not the hibiscus, frangipani and the few other flowers of my childhood. One of the reasons for this is that these established flowers do not stay fresh for very long. In fact, a hibiscus flower lasts only a day. Therefore, people are now valuing the newly introduced flowers more than the old ones, and a consequence is that the old flowers are not planted as much now and are being replaced by new flowers. The new ways of arranging flowers, learnt either at these classes or by people who have gone overseas and come back, have replaced the coconut-rib hibiscus bouquets of my youth.

When I was preparing this paper, I talked about my ideas with a couple of friends with whom I had taught at Samoa College in the 1960s. They told me that they very much prefer decorating their churches with real flowers and had fought to replace artificial flowers with real flowers. There are still members of these two congregations who prefer artificial flowers and would use these when it is their turn to decorate the church. My friends said they believe it is because these people do not want to spend money to buy fresh flowers. Both these women belong to congregations in villages in the Apia area. One of them has a big flower garden around her house. She uses most of these flowers for decorating the church.

She does not use flowers to decorate her house on a regular basis. She says she considers it cruel to pick flowers for the house, especially as she can look out of the house and see them on the plants. Only when fragrant flowers such as gardenia and hoyo are flowering, does she pick them to freshen the house, especially the bathroom. However, when it is her turn to decorate the church, she picks all those in bloom. My second friend does not have as many flowering plants in her garden, so when it is her turn to decorate the church, she buys most of her flowers. She said when there are not so many local flowers, she would ask the commercial growers for imported flowers, and she could spend up to a thousand *tala* to decorate the church for one Sunday. Both these women believe that decorating the church is part of their offering to God. And they believe real flowers are God's gift to us, so we must give them back to Him as a form of worship.

## Conclusion

I conclude by going back to the question “What was the place of flowers in the Church in the past, and how is it changing?” There are three issues I have discussed that I wish to highlight. Samoans, as documented by a number of early writers, used flowers and leaves of plants to adorn their bodies, especially during festivities.

The early missionaries tried to forbid this but, as Kramer commented, that prohibition had little success in Samoa. So the use of flowers for body adornment continues to be part of Samoan culture. However, the missionaries did succeed in forbidding the use of flowers for body adornment in the church, so much so that when I was growing up, I absorbed this as an important value. This value has changed slowly in the past three decades, initiated perhaps by Vatican Two, which allowed the use of native languages and cultural expressions in worship. The use of flowers for *ula*, *sei* and *pale* in the Catholic Churches and shown on Television Samoa, is making it easier for some of the followers of the Protestant churches to accept the practice as not being sinful.

What about the ways different people value real flowers as against artificial flowers? I suggest this debate is partly due to different levels of western education and exposure to western values amongst Samoans. My two friends who prefer real flowers, are overseas educated and well travelled, while my relative in the village who is proud of their many artificial flowers, is village educated, and has been out of Samoa only a few times and only for short visits.

There is no mention in the early writings of the use of flowers to decorate houses in Samoa. The plaiting of *fale* posts with coconut leaves and the chains of leaves and flowers strung between *fale* posts during festivities, I would suggest, was a Samoan innovation to meet an idea introduced by *palagi*. There is also no mention in early writings of the now accepted culture, of greeting or farewelling people with an *ula* (lei). I wonder how long this has been part of our culture?

What really was the position of flowers in Samoan culture? How long does a practice take to become ‘culture’? What about the future? How will flowers be seen in Samoan or Polynesian society as compared to other societies? How is the continuous mobility of Samoans and the tourist industry going to affect the value of flowers in our culture? These questions and many others have been stimulated in my mind by participation in this research project.



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# Contemporary Responses to Commercial Flower Production Opportunities in Samoa

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## Introduction

This paper presents the preliminary findings of interviews with four flower growers in Apia, Samoa. The interviews were conducted in March and April 2000. They aimed at gaining an understanding of the relatively new development and recent growth of a flower industry in Samoa. The views of the growers were sought to establish some knowledge of the historical and contemporary contexts of the industry, and its implications for overall socio-cultural and environmental transformations in the country.

The interviews focused on two important areas of interest: the development of ideas related to flower gardening, and the relationship between flower gardening businesses and population movement. Analysis indicates that flower gardening emerges with popular styles of contemporary housing and new perceptions about the use of the 'domestic' space. The garden occupies a domestic space commonly assumed by society as that belonging to women. Such a space, however, is constituted of different meanings that may not necessarily be gender-based. From another perspective, the domestic space also has become the door for many women to explore the male-dominated world of commercial business.

Connected to this is the increasing mobility among women and the availability of easier forms of communication among them which encourage formal and non-formal exchange or trade of plants. The upsurge of interest in flowers and plants has also been boosted by government-sponsored festivals like the *Teuila*, the Gift Fare and the *Faasao mo Taea* (Safeguard for Tomorrow). Church decoration and other life cycle events such as birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, graduations, and funerals continue also to create a big demand for flowers.

This paper has four parts. Firstly, a brief contextual note provides a background to the growers. Second, the question of how 'domestic' the garden can be in the Samoan context is discussed. Third, an analysis of the notion '*aisi solo* (asking favours) and how it relates to gardening and population mobility in Samoa is presented. The last part discusses the role of church activities and national festivals in boosting gardening and the flower industry in Samoa. The paper concludes by emphasising the value of social relations underlying environmental changes that now characterise the domestic landscape in Samoa.

## The growers

At the outset, the interviews were to involve three groups of (women) growers: those who are commercially established; women who are ‘making business’ from their backyards; and those who operate outside any commercial interests. While the first two groups were relatively easy to identify, the third one was found to not exist at all during the course of the study. While a large number of women can be *seen* as operating outside any commercial interests, the reality is some form of exchange does take place among the growers and the people who know about their gardens. Such exchanges may involve buying plants and flowers or exchanging plants of different types.

One example is Lili, who works full time in a small family shop, and keeps her garden as a hobby. She started planting her garden four years ago because she and her husband just built a new three-bedroom *fale palagi*. She asked for plants from friends and relatives, and would buy from other women during the *Teuila* Festival. Today, Lili’s garden has become an attraction for many women from her church, and she often receives requests for potted plants and flowers. Although Lili does not go out to sell, or advertise plants and flowers, women do buy flowers from her. Sometimes, her relatives and their friends ask her for a bouquet or potted plants for a birthday or some other celebration. Thus, a market for her plants and flowers is already established. The case of Lili speaks to the fact that many women in the church or from Malua Theological College (or the wives of the Theological College students) have gardens simply as a side interest but do, from time to time, sell flowers when there is a serious buyer.

This example reflects the complex nature of flower gardening in Samoa. The industry consists of two major groups. The serious growers who are business oriented, and those who grow primarily out of love for flowers but have found that these provide a good side income. This latter group constitutes the majority of growers. There are women who would go to the market to sell their produce and those who would sell only if a buyer comes to them. It seems that whichever way the grower decides to operate flower gardening is increasingly looked upon as a valued source of income for Samoan families.

The growers involved in the study included three women and one man. They have all had experiences of traveling or living overseas and currently make their homes near or around Apia town.

## The garden as a ‘domestic’ space?

An interesting finding from the interviews is that flower gardening merges with popular styles of housing and new perceptions on domestic space. When asked why they thought flower gardening has become popular these days, the growers generally agreed that new styles of housing were an important factor. As Pepe explains:

[T]hese days are different. I think a lot of people these days like to live in *fale papalagi*, and a *fale papalagi* goes well with a nice garden in the front ... In my own knowledge, those days while we were in Savai’i, for example, you only see a *fale samoa*, then the *paepae* of stones, then you see further down the front and the horse eating the front lawn. You don’t see any plants. It was believed in those days, that plants would block the breeze ... but these days, we know that plants bring good air (oxygen) for your health ... (Interview 1, March 2000)

It appears that the 'domestic' space, in the past, was considered as encompassing the whole extended family. Such a space drew its meaning from the holistic nature of the *'aiga*. It was an open space where *'aiga* members not only resided, but were also buried. The openness of the *fale samoa* and the *malae*, the absence of boundary marks, hedges, fences, and structured English-styled gardens signify not only unhindered movement among local people, as noted by Sutter (1977), or the public nature of Samoan identity as pointed out by Shore (1982), but also the encompassing nature and role of such a space.

The 'domestic' space encompasses both male and female members of *'aiga*; the young and old; the *matai* (chief) and the family; the living and the dead. In other words, any constructs of difference among the *'aiga* were secondary to the unity and sense of togetherness and belonging imprinted on the 'domestic' space itself. When this meaning of the 'domestic' space is taken into consideration, the immediate environment/physical surroundings of the Samoan *'aiga* can be understood as a corporate space characterized by meaningful relations and social interactions among its members. Thus 'domestic' space can also be called *'aiga* space.

The recent emergence of flower gardening has further characterized the *'aiga* space as an inevitable part of the business world currently thriving in and around Apia. In this world of business, new housing styles such as *fale papalagi* are inevitable as people adjust and orient part of their lives towards ways of earning cash income. The *fale papalagi*, while signifying a close-in and more private life of the family members (cf, Sutter 1977; and, Aga and Franco 1997), may not necessarily signify a gender difference in the use of the 'domestic' space within which it stands. In other words, the flower garden that emerges with new housing styles in Samoa, is not necessarily a preserve for women as often claimed in the literature. Rather, it is a space where both men and women corporately explore their experiences and expertise with plants and the commercialisation of flowers.

It was noted during the interviews that the women acknowledged the assistance and co-operation of their husbands in making the garden. Pepe, for example, proudly showed me the plants that her husband had bought for her birthday or some other special occasion. She added,

Without Pita's [her husband's] help I wouldn't be able to have this garden ... He went out and got all the tools, the chicken manure, and whatnots, from his friends when we started the garden. He skipped work on some Saturday mornings and would stay home to help the children and me. So, yeah, credit to him too ... (Interview 1).

The other two women, Sina and Lili also acknowledged the support from their husbands saying that their husbands let them do what they wanted to do most rather than seeing responsibility to do the garden as a domestic chore. And gardening, the women claim, has always been their passion. So, in this way, it is obvious that the women who are involved in gardening are doing what they wanted to do in life, not because it is a domestic duty to do it, or that they have to do it. Thus, the garden as domestic space does not necessarily imply that it is simply a 'woman's world' or a woman's chore.

The changes in housing style and the demand for flowers speak of the different ways that the domestic environment has been perceived and used. Most of the commercial growers are women who used to have full-time jobs outside of their homes. Pepe, for example, was a travel agent, and Sina was previously a bank officer and flight attendant. Both of them now run florist businesses. For them, flower gardening is an extension of their previous involvement in the

commercial world of work. Gardening has allowed them more flexibility to operate from home and still be part of the business world.

There are also women who have little or no experience in the commercial world of work. Gardening, for them, is not the only part of their domestic chores, but also a way for them to become involved in the business world. Buying or asking for nurtured plants from someone else is really a business act. As Lili observed: "... sometimes asking for plants is like begging ... you know, begging for financial assistance from the bank. You have to convince the other person that you're genuine and that you are going to look after the plants or flowers for them". (Interview 2, March 2000). Likewise, Sina thinks that gardening is more than just another home-based job as she sees it creating a space for herself in the business world.

My garden and my flowers really are a market for today and for the future. When I step into my garden, I really think of myself stepping into the money market. You know there are hotels coming up, restaurants are coming up and people are looking at different tastes ... so there's a lot to look forward to as far as gardening is concerned ... (Interview 3, April 2000)

### ***'Aisi solo: mobility and plant exchanges***

Population mobility is an established characteristic of Samoan society. This has been proven true for the international dimension, and it is particularly true for the local scene. Movement within Samoa may refer to daily commuting between places and especially between the villages and the Apia urban area, as well as between the islands. It could also include *malaga* or planned short-term travels of parties or groups. Increasing local movement has emerged with the availability of more public and private transport. As Tofa noted:

I left Samoa fifteen years ago for the US, and I never thought of coming back. Now I'm back, my goodness there's so many changes in the country...You know, almost every farmer in my village [where he grew up] now has a pick-up truck or van. When I left, it was only my father and the pastor that had cars, everybody else had to catch the bus ... (Interview 4, April 2000)

When asked what he thought were the reasons for these changes, Tofa replied: "To me, *ua tele tagata mai fafo* [many people from outside]". Tofa refers to the many overseas-based Samoans and other non-Samoan visitors who come and go, bringing not only new ideas and goods into the country but also creating new demands among local people. International travel has also helped stimulate considerable local movement. The fact that almost every family now has a vehicle means that distance is no longer a hindrance to movement. The growers I spoke with said that they got some of their plants by just going *'aisi solo* — the term literally means 'begging' and is often used in daily conversation to mean 'borrow' or 'ask a favour of someone' — from other growers during one of their visits or trips around the island. When they see a nice garden they stop to ask for or buy plants. According to Pepe:

It's so much easier these days for a friend at say, Lefaga or Falelatai to tell you, 'Come visit and get some plants'. The kind of things you couldn't do five, ten years ago, now it's so easy to do today with a car (Interview 1).

Lili, who is originally from Savai'i, explained:

The fact that we've shifted to, and are now based in Apia means a lot of traveling for us between Savai'i and Upolu. Almost every week, the old man and I would go to Savai'i, because we are still the *matai* (chief) of his family at Fagamalo ... So everytime I go to Savai'i, I always use that chance to 'aisi for plants from other people. If I happen to visit a family and they have a plant that I really like, I'd just 'aisi them ... (Interview 2)

### **Influence of church decoration and national festivals**

Church decoration seems to have created a big demand for flowers. As Sina points out:

If you have a good look around, there's all sorts of fancy church buildings in Apia and the back villages. We no longer have the simple church *fale* as in those days. So I think because we have big church buildings, the women who clean and decorate them would like to decorate them with modern style bouquet and pot plants ... There are women who really want to have nice decorations, and so they order their flowers from me. I've had quite a few of those and they don't mind paying the price ... (Interview 3)

Flowers and plants for church decoration are expensive especially when buying from an established commercial grower like Sina. The majority of women (for they are mostly the ones who lead and direct church decorating) would ask for leaves or flowers from either a neighbour, a friend, or a relative. In Lili's church, each 'aiga headed by a deacon takes turns to decorate the church for Sunday or mid-week services. She said because of this roster, almost all families in her church have now begun to plant their own gardens. She pointed out: "People are aware that plants and flowers cost money, and the only way to save money is to plant your own" (Interview 2). Many of these families have come to her to 'aisi some plants for their gardens. (Also, see Fiti-Sinclair, this collection.)

The situation is similar in Tofa's church, but it is the *Mafutaga a Tina* or Mothers' group that organises and oversees church decoration. This group is divided into nine or ten smaller teams who take weekly turns to decorate the church. According to Tofa, the mothers of the *Mafutaga a Tina* at his church have been consistent clients at his flower shop, and this is good business for him. But he would also still encourage them to plant their own gardens, simply because he wants them to understand that "Flowers are just like taro, *ta'amu* (giant taro), or bananas. Every Samoan has a piece of land and if you plant your own, no need to buy from the market, right?" (Interview 4)

This is not to say that these women do not grow any plants. But because not all of them have the different varieties of plants, especially flowering plants, that the commercial growers have, the women tend to buy or 'aisi from someone else. Also, the styles of bouquet and floral arrangements that are common these days with the varieties of flowers appeal greatly to many women, most of whom cannot make these themselves. Thus many church women need to buy rather than make a bouquet for church decoration.

Besides church decoration, the national festivals such as the *Teuila*, Gift Fare and the *Fa'asao mo Taeao*, have also boosted much interest in plants and flowers. All the growers interviewed noted that these festivals have helped them access some of the most rare varieties of plants found in

other Pacific Islands like the Cook Islands and Hawaii. These activities also have provided them with opportunities to link up with other growers who would give information on the life of, and how to care for, 'new' plants. More importantly, the festivals have been a way for the growers to sell not only their plants and flowers, but also some handicrafts that they make. Two of the respondents are regular attendants at these fairs, and have found that they give them very good business. Lili has been most enthusiastic about selling at the festivals, and she proudly discussed her sales:

The festivals ... that's the peak time for my business. My plants always give me a good profit. See, what I usually do is I buy plants during the festivals, then I grow them and make more small plants to sell at the festival the next year. So, now you figure out. If I buy this orchid for thirty *tala*, I can make five or six more potted plants from it, all ready for sale in the next *Teuila* ... and I sell them each for the same price of thirty *tala*. So figure out how much I make from one orchid, eh? (Interview 2)

It is obvious that the national festivals, which have basically been an effort by government to attract tourists, have paved the way for many women growers and gardeners to trade their produce. They have, by and large, stimulated the growth of plant and flower production and women especially have taken this up as a new 'hobby' that generates a useful side-income for their families.

## Conclusion

The discussion in this paper has indicated that although flower gardening has only recently emerged in Samoa, it has become a fast-growing business venture. Its business potential has been quickly recognized and embraced, especially by women. Plants and flowers now have not only opened a door for women to step into the commercial world of business, but have also added to the overall changes in the domestic landscape in the Islands.

Gardens of colorful flowers and different plant types are believed to co-exist with new housing styles, namely *fale papalagi*. The emergence of these types of 'landscapes' have been due to increasing international and domestic movement among the local people, accompanied by the flows of goods and ideas across places. While new questions emerge as to the definition and use of the garden as 'domestic' space, there is no doubt that gardening remains an '*aiga*' space in the context of Samoan society. In spite of environmental transformations in the Islands, the social relations constituted in this '*aiga*' space should be valued in an analysis of the transformation of the landscape as in the case of flower gardening in Samoa.

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## **Flowering Identities in Samoa and the Cook Islands: Population Mobility and Environmental Transformation in the Eastern Pacific**

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### **Introduction**

In this paper I want to bring into sharper focus the poly-ethnic character of Polynesian communities in the islands through a broad examination of one way in which population mobility transforms physical and cultural environments. Just as Rensel (1997: 7) argues for ordinary houses, “mundane domestic arenas [are] most often taken for granted”, in this working paper I focus specifically on how flowers in Samoa and the Cook Islands are used and understood.

Flowers are widely invoked as a distinct material and symbolic representation of Polynesian culture. They are worn as single blooms; woven into *leis*, *ei* and *ula* and worn on the head and around the neck; feature in fabric prints, quilts and mats; and, increasingly, find themselves as central displays in tourist hotels. They also feature prominently in the domestic environmental landscape of many gardens in Samoa and the Cook Islands and are tended proudly by the mostly women flower gardeners. It is no surprise then, that Pacific tourism offices name their cultural festivals after common flowers which have been designated ‘national flowers’, such as the *Teuila* festival in Samoa, the Hibiscus festival in Fiji and the *Maire* festival in the Cook Islands.

However, ‘flowers’, by which I am also including other scented plants like *maire* and *ara*, are also being reconstructed in other ways while still invoking their claim to be a central Polynesian cultural symbol. *Leis* of boiled sweets, chocolate bars and money are increasingly being used instead of ‘traditional’ flower *leis*. At graduation ceremonies in Samoa *ula lole* or ‘lolly *leis*’ are actually preferred by graduands. This contrasts markedly with the preference for flower *leis* at graduation ceremonies in Hawaii. Increasingly, arriving and departing friends in Samoa, the Cook Islands and Tonga are bedecked with lolly or money *leis*. On Mothers’ Day in Samoa in 1999, it was only the ‘lolly *lei*’ that was being presented to Mothers throughout the community. These new types of *leis* are also used at ceremonies like weddings, especially *leis* made of money, in addition to flower *leis*.

What is it about the ‘*lei*’ that gives it a special Polynesian cultural flavour? The wonderful aroma and coolness of a full *plumeria lei*, *mokosoi ula*, or *tiare maire ei katu* is not to be missed. However, maybe there is something in the presenting of such things that is more important than the ‘natural’ characteristics of the flowers themselves? Just how important are ‘flowers’ as markers of Polynesian cultural identity? And what ‘flowers’ are we referring to?

These are complex questions that I cannot completely address in this particular paper. However they guide my inquiry and lead me to think more about the poly-ethnic character of Polynesian communities in the islands. This paper is structured in the following way. After introducing how I undertook the study, I look briefly at how the place of flowers has changed especially during the 1990s, a decade that has seen considerable movement of people between many different places. I

then examine two themes that stood out in the interviews that I carried out in Samoa. This is still research-in-progress.

## Methodology

I began this project by reflecting on previous research I had undertaken on population mobility and cultural identity in the Pacific (Underhill-Sem and Fitzgerald 1996). Recently I had also tried to argue for ways in which theoretical advances in critical human geography could inform population geography by examining the cultural nuances of taken-for-granted understandings like pregnancy for instance (Underhill-Sem 1999). This reflection provided the context from which I developed the structure for interviews. It also provides the basis for a more extensive review of published literature that has yet to be undertaken.

As a piece of exploratory research I talked with a variety of personal friends and family members in Samoa, the Cook Islands and New Zealand. Most of these people were women who had travelled variously both in the Pacific and outside the region. I asked them about their gardens, how they got interested in gardening and what changes had they seen in the types of flowers grown and the ways in which flowers were being used. I then undertook audio-taped interviews with four women, two in Samoa and two in the Cook Islands. The two women in Samoa were unknown to me but were recommended by friends because they both had longstanding interests in gardens and had subsequently built successful businesses around their gardening interests. Both had lived most of their lives in Samoa although they had travelled extensively. The two women in the Cook Islands also had longstanding interests in flower gardens. One was a relative and had returned to the Cook Islands seven years ago after living for 20 years in New Zealand. The other woman was slightly younger, in her 40s (the previous women interviewed were in their 50s and 60s). She had recently begun to develop an extensive arboretum in Rarotonga with related commercial enterprises. She had also travelled extensively.

I have also had extensive informal discussion with women and men from Samoa, Tonga, and the Cook Islands who are interested in many different aspects of flowers. This included a Cook Island woman married to a Samoan who has lived in Samoa for over twenty years and has developed an extensive flower garden 'purely for pleasure', a woman living in Mauke who currently harvests the *maire* flower for the Hawaiian market, and numerous Cook Island women who have been long-time residents of New Zealand. I also undertook informal interviews with academic staff of the National University of Samoa, The University of the South Pacific's Alafua Campus and the Samoa Visitors Bureau. In this version of the project, I draw mainly from the Samoan interviews as I have yet to fully analyse the transcripts of the Cook Island material.

I reviewed some biological literature describing the various names, locations and uses of different plants and their flowers. Although there was some detail on the use of plants, in general this body of information was lean for my purposes. More research has been reported on the medicinal rather than the decorative or other expressive uses of plants and flowers. I surveyed several editions of the in-flight magazine of Polynesian airlines, which frequently features flowers in its articles. This material was extremely attractively presented but tended towards descriptive and simple explanations for popular consumption. It was however useful to capture the taken-for-granted characteristics of flowers in Samoa. Although the Cook Islands does not have a national airline, an examination of tourist material on the country might provide a similar perspective.

## Flowers in Polynesia – of course!

Although the islands of the Eastern Pacific have lower levels of natural biodiversity than the Western Pacific, the particular combinations of climate and soil are conducive to growing a range of introduced plants. So while the diversity of plants may not be huge there is certainly an abundance of vegetation including flowering plants. Over the years different types of non-tropical flowers have also been successfully established. In the late 1990s roses, marigolds, zinnias, and daisies are commonly interspersed with hibiscus and gardenia bushes in Samoa and the Cook Islands. It is not unusual though to find only the easy growing and brightly coloured marigolds around *fale* in Samoa. Not surprisingly these flowers are also finding their way into *leis* and *ula* and more formally into bouquets and flower displays on reception desks. A formal flower growing industry has begun to develop in response to the demand for flowers and the relative ease with which they appear to grow (see Liki in this volume).

With the introduction of new types of plants, there have been obvious problems related to pests associated with diseased organic material moving unchecked between island countries. It is for this reason that Samoa suffered a disastrous taro blight in the late 1990s, a disease similar to that affecting frangipani trees in Rarotonga in 1999-2000. There is also biological competition whereby the more hardy character of invasive species dominates indigenous plants. The emerging flower industry in the Pacific, which plans to take advantage of the ease with which plants grow in the Pacific, would need to deal with these issues and develop procedures for curtailing the ubiquitous smuggling of plants between island countries.

There is an obvious potential for a viable flower industry in the Pacific Islands. Flower growers with commercial interests in Samoa and Fiji recognise the intense local demand for flowers. Increasingly, people are buying flowers whereas even ten years ago, many more families had flower gardens from which to pick the flowers needed for decorating gravestones, churches or tables at wedding celebrations. In the past family members and friends would regularly share plant cuttings, but increasingly, people are very cautious about who takes what from whose garden.

It has been always taken-for-granted that there are flowers in Polynesia. However, the flowers and combination of plant material is changing just as the ways in which different people move from place to place and over different times is changing. It is not this change that is surprising but the complex texturing of these changes in taken for granted domestic and public activities. There are many ways in which cultures express themselves and this project seeks to examine the locations and dislocations of the place of flowers in Polynesian cultural identity.

“Samoans have always valued flowers”, reports a 1998 edition of the *Polynesian*, the in-flight magazine of the national airline of Samoa, Polynesian Airlines. This is also something that is taught to many newly arrived visitors to Samoa such as young Peace Corps volunteers and Japanese exchange students. I was also taught this when I enrolled in a Samoan language and culture class at the National University of Samoa. It seemed obvious enough for anyone first arriving in Samoa: vivid tropical blooms resonate brightly in the sun against the lush green foliage that grows so easily on the dark volcanic rock and soil.

Yet as a Cook Islander and having visited other Pacific countries, this comment immediately raised questions about the extent to which this was true for all places and people in Samoa. My

initial questions about this were often met with versions of ‘of course, can’t you see we all love flowers’ and ‘this is a flower culture’ and ‘flowers are an integral part of Samoan culture’. So my curiosity was aroused and I embarked on more intensive examination of these issues.

### **Scent, form and colour: secular and religious markers**

What was it about flowers that motivated the women I interviewed to make them such a central part of their lives? How much of their current engagement with flowers was due to their being Polynesians, part of which included traveling from their home islands? All my interviewees initially rated the scent of the flower or plant as being more important than its form or colour. However, all said that it depended on how the flower was being used. If it was to be used in church display, colour and longevity were important whereas as a greeting, a scented flower presentation was preferred. It also seemed to depend on the diversity of plants available to choose from. Flower gardens made more diverse by the use of exotic species provided greater choice and encouraged the display or use of flowers in many places and at different times. In this section, I discuss the different ways that particular characteristics of flowers were used and in doing so raise some interesting questions about flowers as markers of Polynesian cultural identity.

Tui identified both the scent and the texture of plants in her response to my question: “What is it that you like about flowers?” She owned and operated a number of enterprises along with her husband who was also a Samoan. She had lived all her life in Samoa but she had earlier worked for an airline. In the late 1990s they opened an up-market tourist resort that has found a comfortable niche in the Samoan tourist market. All such places feature gardens but as Tui said “we (she and her husband) could see that landscape would be a big part of Samoa and we could see developments starting and things like that and so we decided to turn our skills towards that, towards landscaping”. As a considered commercial decision this has proved to be a good business but it is not separate from Tui’s more day-to-day enjoyment that comes from tending flowers. Tui and her husband had always cultivated flowers in their family garden, trying different plants and paying particular attention to scent, form and colour. She explained “we travelled quite a bit ... when we were younger [and] when you went around, ... you associate certain smells with ... it brings back memories of certain things”. As well as her attention to landscape, Tui had also carefully positioned scented flowers in the gardens around the resort to ensure guests could enjoy the perfume.

Other interviewees also mentioned the ways in which the scent of a flower evokes different places. All interviewees said that it was the scent of the flower that was more important ‘in the past’ especially to perfume the ubiquitous coconut oil that was used on the body. This is why scented leaves like the *mokosoi* and *maire* were harvested. However, plants with perfumed flowers were more likely to be cultivated. Throughout the Cook Islands several varieties of the sweet smelling gardenia are routinely planted in gardens so as to have a plentiful supply of flowers for *lei*. The importance of the scent of a flower is also supported by the fact that despite the abundance of scent-less local orchids growing wild in Samoa, they have never featured as flowers of any significance.

In the Cook Islands, both women interviewed said that the scent of a flower is important. It is not just the scent of the single flower placed behind the ear so that one can get a trace of its perfume when you turn your head, but also the combination of flowers. In Mauke magnificent *leis* are

made combining the highly scented *maire*, *tiare maire*, *ara* and *mokosoi*. Such *leis* are used in both Samoa and the Cook Islands by partygoers – they can provide both an alluring scent but also have a refreshing effect on balmy tropical nights. One of my Cook Island informants told me: “When I know I’m going out at night, I pick my flowers in the morning so I can make my *ei* or *lei katu*. But whenever I leave the house (yard) I don’t feel dressed unless I have a flower in my hair”.

The colour and form of flowers were also important in other contexts, especially in decorating buildings, including churches. There is no doubt the ritual behind the magnificent flower displays in many churches was introduced by the early missionaries in the Pacific. In the past there is little evidence that Pacific Islanders decorated inside houses although the outside of structures were often bedecked with leaves and flowers for special occasions. Church decoration is a major weekly activity by the women of the congregation and each family has their turn to provide flowers. One of my interviewees said that was why her mother planted flowers in the first place – to have flowers so she could decorate the church (see Fiti-Sinclair, and Liki, in this volume).

Today in Samoa, flower decorations in church can be found at both ends of the spectrum. In some inner city churches, the competition for providing the most magnificent displays is so intense that huge amounts of money are spent. In other smaller churches off the beaten path, Sunday flower displays amount to pulling out the collection of plastic flowers in a vase. There are many villages and houses in Samoa that do not have an abundance of exotic or introduced flowers in gardens surrounding their *fale*. This raises questions about the extent to which people in Samoa have reconstructed flower gardens as ‘Samoa’ places influenced by non-Samoan religious ideas about the place of flowers.

It is also interesting to note that in special secular activities such as the bestowal of titles in both the Cook Islands and Samoa, plain leaves are used as garlands, not the highly perfumed flowers or flowers with dramatic form and colour. In Hawaii one of the most sought-after *lei* for occasions of special formal significance is one made entirely of the *maire*, a green shiny leaf with a subtle but distinctive scent. On the island of Mauke, a small but lucrative trade has developed exporting *maire* to meet this demand in Hawaii, even though *maire* was not recognised as having such a use in earlier days. One older lady told me that when she was a young girl in Mauke, the *maire* grew everywhere and nobody bothered about it. She insisted they did not even use it for scenting coconut oil.

### **Sharpening our senses by moving around**

As with many objects and activities in daily domestic environments, the use and appreciation of flowers is also affected by the mobility experiences. Tui commented that in her travels she has been influenced in particular by what she had seen in Honolulu, Australia and some places in South East Asia. Over the years her garden has changed constantly as new plants were introduced, others were lost and the possibilities of yet others were contemplated. Her current focus is now on natives and especially *heliconias*.

All my interviewees had had opportunities to travel. Although there are many mobile Pacific Islanders, there are also many who only enjoy travelling vicariously. This places them in a relatively less economically privileged position to those who are interested in flowers but who cannot afford to travel. It is not too surprising to find that some households with more access to

money have more extensive flowers gardens, enhanced by both material inputs like fertilisers as well as the free time to tend the gardens and the ability to have 'new' or introduced plants.

The fragile character of many of the introduced plants became evident after two severe hurricanes in Samoa in the early 1990s. Everything in Tui's garden was flattened but the natives 'came back' very quickly, especially the *heliconias*. Now she designs her gardens by enhancing the shape of the natural landscape with natives and building on from there. She is increasingly using native varieties of orchids that she believes have a huge currently untapped potential even though, or perhaps because, she argues, they are hard to find in the uplands of the volcanic islands of Upolu and Savai'i, and have neither a scent nor great form. Here Tui is pointing to the importance of reconstructing the value of the orchid in relation to what is currently valued about flowers.

Tui also cultivates a large nursery of plants, mostly exotic palms, for their landscaping enterprise. They employ 30 people who propagate and tend their plants. I asked if these people had a particular interest in plants. Tui was clear that for most of them it was strictly a job because they needed the money. Tui said that if workers were too interested in plants for themselves, they often had problems in the plants being stolen. However she insisted, most people who worked for them were there for the money. This raises the question of the extent to which flowers are an integral part of what it is to be a Polynesian.

### **Flower gardening as a woman's domain**

I was also interested in the gender dimension of flower gardening. In general, it was reported to me that women tended the flower gardens and men tended the food gardens. This generalization was mentioned many times even though there were many women in Samoa who took a much greater interest in the food gardens, perhaps because of the importance of subsistence gardening for families without a regular cash income. This was also the preferred focus for some women who grew up in villages and valued food gardening as a way of life.

The church obligations that came with membership of women's groups in Samoan villages are highly effective in reinforcing cultural norms in Samoa. This relates to activities around the villages including keeping the village area clean of fallen leaves and ensuring areas around *fale* were weed-free and bathing pools were kept clean and decorated with flowers. To further enforce these ideals, the Samoan Visitors' Bureau offered prizes for the most attractive villages. The Health Department along with the Women's Division held regular inspections of villages where kitchen and ablution areas were closely inspected. There is clearly considerable opportunity for ideas aside from individual inclination and preference to affect the day-to-day physical environment that is usually the domain of women.

However, since flower production has become more of a commercial enterprise, more men have become involved. Men are growing flowers for sale, especially orchids. They are also involved in floral arrangements and the main tutor in courses servicing a Pacific-wide demand to learn flower arrangement skills is a male. Many women attend these classes to enhance their own people skills and some have turned flower growing into a commercial enterprise.

Everyone agreed that gardening was something you were either interested in or not. There are many houses in Samoa that do not have flowers planted around them. All the women with whom I spoke had an early interest in flowers, even if no one else in the family was keen. One said

neither her mother, brothers or sisters were keen flower gardeners but she attributed her love of flowers to her father. She said: “My Father was an artist. I think that – that brings an idea – you know I have this in me that I like, I love nature”.

## **Conclusion**

I think this preliminary report of recent research has raised some interesting questions to further examine the widely accepted idea that flowers are inherently part of Polynesian cultural identity. Historically, the place of flowers is not clear (Sinclair in this volume). Individual interest in tending flowers in a home garden is as important as individual interest in developing flowers as a productive resource (see Liki, and Lima, in this volume). Flowers seem to have very easily been replaced in contemporary situations by proxies that have no floral scent and do not look or feel like a flower. There are also some native flowers and plants, like some varieties of orchids, which have these very same characteristics, yet they are still not given any value. Since more and more Pacific Islanders are living away from their home islands, it is not surprising that more permanent forms of flower decorations are required. Almost every flight into Samoa and the Cook Islands includes passengers carrying artificial flower decorations to honour deceased family members. But the question about what is a flower remains unanswered.

Further questions to address include the following: How do the realities and future possibilities of the commercialisation of ‘flowers’ dovetail with the ‘traditional’ use and value of flowers? To what extent are these initiatives stimulated by people’s experiences of other places where flowers are more established as commercial product? To what extent have flowers become a commodity? Does commodification help explain the presence of colourful and longer-lasting silk and plastic flowers? How does this sit with the sense of flowers being an integral part of Polynesian cultural identity? These questions, amongst others, are integral components of on-going research into population movement, social transformation, and environmental change in island countries of the Pacific.

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## What Samoans Want Today is ‘a Quarter Acre Section of Freehold’

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There is a saying that Samoa is like a fish that has been divided — every piece of land has been allocated, and every person knows their place for all time.

The *fa'a Samoa* is the *matai*: the *matai* is the family is the land. The land is the village; the village is the family, is the *matai*, is the *fa'a Samoa*.

The Samoan village is intimately related to the land. Land-use practices cannot be understood without knowledge of Samoan social structure, custom, values and aspirations ... To consider separately the village where people live and the land on which they work would be unrealistic (Farrell and Ward 1962: 177).

### The meaning of land

In the *fa'a Samoa* to mention a district or a *matai* title is to immediately recall the history of that family and their lands, the wars fought, the bloodlines and the alliances and the family heritage captured for all time in a plot of land. The families' glorious past and feelings of identity and belonging are all rooted in the soil and the stones — the concept of my standing place — the *turangawaewae* of the Maori people — my spiritual home. This personal valuing of land explains the endless cases in the Land and Titles Court — which have replaced the land wars of earlier days as the testing place for family knowledge of their heritage. The following example captures some of the *fa'a Samoa* feelings about land which are very difficult to put into words:

A dispute over a section of land arose between two families in one village, and as a result one of the *matai* brought a land case against the other families. As can be expected this action caused much ill feeling throughout the entire village. I asked a woman, ‘Why is x doing that? Why doesn't he just leave it? That family doesn't need the land. They have plenty’. She replied: ‘He has to do it. He has to establish the *pule* (authority which belongs to that title). He is not a good *matai* if he doesn't think of the family’. When I talked to the *matai* he said ‘I have to do it for the family. My father's father fought for that land and planted that land. And for the family to come’. The opinions of other village members confirmed the view that it would have been a display of family weakness if the *matai* had not disputed the claim. It would have demonstrated that ‘the title is not strong’ (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1991).

The *fa'a Samoa* value of land is primarily the feelings of individual and family identity – social, political and psychological well-being. This is not to deny the undoubted economic valuing of

land, as in the ability this gave in traditional times for the family to produce enough food to feed their armies and keep them in battle, food for the family and for reciprocal and ceremonial exchanges which nurtured the kinship links. Land was the family foundation — the vehicle for the balancing of power in *fa'a Samoa* social structures. As is well documented, family lands are under the care of the family *matai* — elected by family members to serve the family and maintain, and if possible enhance, the family status. Every family member — by blood, or who serves the title — has equal rights to the family lands through the family *matai*. Land is usually allocated according to need (not too much and not too little) and with an eye to sharing the rich lands and the not so good lands, so maintaining a balance of power.

The fundamental importance of the relationship between kinship lineages and land is evidenced in the fact that electoral boundaries follow these customary district lines, rather than being strictly geographic. Thus we have the example of the constituency of Gagaeimauga No 1 where, as a result of volcanic eruptions destroying a village, an electoral district is split into two — one on Savai'i (the home base) and the other at Leauvaa on Upolu. *Matai* suffrage also encapsulates the *fa'a Samoa* — of the *matai* elected by and speaking for the *aiga*. Customary land is one with the communal systems: land is the resource that ensures every family member has the means to enjoy a good quality of life.

Land and the family are synonymous. Land and the way this is used are key elements of the *fa'a Samoa* social systems. There are functional linkages between the allocation of land, the means of mobilising labour and the social structure (Ward 1993). The systems for allocating, validating the use of and transferring the rights to land lie at the core of Samoan social systems and are basic to much of the political and governmental structure of the country. Any change in land tenure has implications for the *fa'a Samoa* structure — social, political, spiritual and feelings of identity and esteem.

### **Land holding in contemporary Samoa**

As a result of migration, travel, exchange of information, material goods and experiences with new lifestyles, Pacific ways of life in both the home islands and the new homelands are moving towards a consumer and commercial society. This is seen in increased aspirations, increasing cash economy and individualisation of life styles and related processes. Changes in land tenure will mean that the principles under which much of the commercial economy of Samoa operates will be contradictory to *fa'a Samoa* norms. The socio-political hierarchy may become dislocated from its economic base. Socio-economic changes undermine socio-political structures. Just to keep pace with and retain the valued elements of island culture is a major intellectual challenge.

Much research has focussed on changes in customary land as a result of people using communally owned land in what Ward (1993) terms 'markedly individual ways'. This is evidenced in the planting of long term crops: keeping land in use and so enabling people to retain use rights (and authority) for much longer periods than under shifting cultivation. Ward (1993) emphasises the use of a traditional mechanism for non-traditional purposes. The building of houses of permanent and costly materials is another signifier of permanent ownership, as is the number of widows not returning to their natal villages on the death of their husbands but staying where they are — all their life has been an investment in their husband's village, their children, homes and future.

Entering wage employment rather than utilising kinship links, and retaining cash within the immediate family, rather than sharing it more widely with kin, are other examples of the shift in attitudes, as is the withdrawal of groups from some or all of the normal customary community obligations. For example, significant numbers of families live as nuclear families but meet together on ‘big’ occasions or *fa’alavelave*. The emergence of fencing and bush hedges is another aspect. When I undertook household surveys in Siumu in 1989 there were few fences along the Siumu stretch of road. By 1996, there was a most definite fence line indicating boundaries and ownership. O’Meara (1990) argues that much customary land is already individualised in that it is no longer under the authority of the family organisation. Some Samoan scholars argue that O’Meara lacks understanding of the social systems overlaying this seemingly individual use of land.

Much scrutiny of customary land is also taking place under the banner of the economic value of land for development purposes. Development theorists highlight the very visible tracts of un-used land in all Pacific countries and how this land should be used for national economic growth. Social scientists and demographers point to the pressure on land stating that land lies idle while many families ‘who need this most’ have insufficient land to meet their basic daily needs. The indigenous peoples’ view is that people migrating have chosen to make their home in a new land leaving the land at home for those who stay and maintain the society. The Cook Islands’ Government recently announced a proposal that unused customary land could be taken for economic purposes, and if people came back they could be recompensed. How this would happen was not made clear.

## Research focus

This paper reviews the present status of freehold land in Samoa. It does not look specifically at customary land — although what is happening under the customary banner obviously impacts on the demand for, and use of, freehold land. This includes issues such as the way customary land is allocated, use and misuse of *matai* power and response to pressure on land.

I will argue that while the customary land tenure systems are still substantially intact and acknowledged, what every Samoan wants today is their own quarter acre of freehold land, unencumbered, free from *matai* obligations and which “we *know* we will be able to pass on to our own children”. This suggests a lack of confidence in the support systems which the customary lands provided.

Some of the questions raised in this paper are:

- a) What is happening with regard to freehold land and what factors are influencing these developments?
- b) In particular, what is the influence of migration?
- c) Is there more freehold land for sale and, if so, who is buying it, who is selling it and why?
- d) How does this affect the *fa’a Samoa* valuing and meaning of land now and for the future?

The latter question covers issues such as individual and community, nuclear and extended family, the use of social space, and the very baseline of land being *pule*, spiritual feelings and self and family identity — feelings of rightness with the world, my future and my past. What do any of

the changes hold for the future of the *matai* structures and the customary land which supports these?

Does the purchase of freehold land signify (a) a withdrawal from the *fa'a Samoa*? (b) a duality where people operate between two systems so that they can maintain the relationships implicit in the *fa'a Samoa* albeit from a nuclear household site? Is the *fa'a Samoa* being recreated within a physically bounded space, separate from the family land? Is there a separation of these two value systems and, if so, what is the nature of the intellectual and social challenge this separation implies?

There are other issues including differential access, the emergence of social classes (those who can buy and those who cannot and probably will never buy), access by gender, age and locality. There is also the issue of commodification of land and how this influences perceptions relating to the valuing of customary land. Population growth, increased urbanisation and growth of the Apia suburbs, along with more people with more money to purchase land and an influx of foreign capital and foreign ideas about having one's own land, unencumbered and free are contributing to these changed perceptions. There is a growing desire amongst Samoans for access to land that has title and can be used as collateral for a loan. Land is seen increasingly as an economic asset.

In this paper I review some preliminary findings from a series of case studies compiled from interviews with land agents, key informants (sellers and buyers of freehold land) and a review of relevant literature and legislation.

### **The freehold situation today**

In the past, land was not usually sold but accessed through the family systems, according to need. Those interviewed recalled that land sales were usually carried out by lawyers or family representatives in a very private manner. This no doubt reflects *fa'a Samoa* norms concerning 'selling' rather than 'giving', but also the fact that in this case land (the *tulaga*) was the commodity.

Land sales are now much more visible in newspaper advertisements. In 1980 the *Samoa Observer* newspaper listed a total of 69 entries of land for sale (see Appendix Tables A1 and A2). By advertising agency, this represented one land agent (51 entries), 15 private sales (seven of these were by the Nelson company and indicate the breaking up of the Nelson estates on Savai'i) and the remaining two were sales by lawyer. The latter were estate sales. By way of contrast, twenty years later there has been a significant increase in the number of properties listed for sale in the daily papers and it is not uncommon for land sales to take up to two pages of daily newspaper space. For example, on June 4, 2000 there were 46 entries.

Not only has there been an increase in advertised land but there have been changes in the agencies being used to sell land: of these listings in June 2000, 27 were being sold by land agents (now totaling three), 16 by individuals (two of these were commercial) and 13 by lawyers. Prices show an astounding leap (Table 1), reflecting demand, and the availability of cash and loans. There may also be some truth in the public perception that 'land agents are pushing up prices'.

**Table 1 Land price comparisons 1980 and 2000 (Samoa Tala, ST\$)**

Area	1980 ( <i>Observer</i> )	2000 (June 4 <i>Observer</i> )
Vaitel 1/4 acre	3,400	38,000 - 45,000
Saleufi 1/4 (town area)	25,000	150,000 (Fugalei market)
Siusega 1/4	3,500	40,000
Mt Vaea 1 acre	25,000	50- 60,000 per quarter acre

Simply put, freehold land in Samoa is an extremely marketable commodity. It is a business with all the associated patter such as ‘prime residential area’, ‘breath taking ocean views’, ‘excellent investment’ and ‘ideal for your very first home’. Some of this patter is captured in the following advertisement which probably could be found anywhere in the world.

TIAVI OCEAN VIEW SUBDIVISION

42X5 acre lots. Be part of this new and exciting subdivision all enjoying panoramic ocean views, cool climate, fertile soils and much more. Great investment or retirement retreats. Finance available. Be in quick. Priced from \$100,000. Terms available: 60% deposit, balance payable over 5 years at 8% interest pa.

*Observer, June 4 2000*

Furthermore, building permit data (Table A3) suggests a time of unprecedented house construction that indicates the availability of land for building as well as a buoyant economy.

The sheer visibility of land sales information suggests that there is more land for sale. If this is so, where is this extra land coming from? Is customary land somehow being converted into freehold land? Indications are that while the amount of freehold land has remained constant, there has been a significant increase in the amount of freehold land being sold. The freehold land comes under the following categories:

- a) Land taken by the German Administration or donated to religious organisations (2 % of freehold land).

Much of this freehold land comprises very large blocks, the result of a system of Court Grants. For example, generally speaking in earlier days “half-castes of ‘repute’” made a deputation to Government and paid them for land that appeared not to be used. Sometimes money was paid for these, sometimes not. Customary owners are now disputing the legality of some of these transactions.

b) Land from large family blocks.

A significant amount of land on the market today reflects the breaking up of these large family blocks gained through Court Grant. This is a response to demand (high prices and little freehold land) but also reflects changing family circumstances, such as the need to share family estates amongst a large number of children, for example, family needs and migration.

c) Land available through conversion of WSTEC (Western Samoa Trust Estates Corporation) lands to freehold title (WSTEC lands are the former Reparation Estates).

The financial difficulties of WSTEC prompted the selling of two large blocks of land at Vaialele and Vaitele in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This was done in a number of ways. For example, about 600 acres at Vaitele was subdivided and sold as quarter acre blocks by the National Provident Fund (NPF). At the Vaitele industrial area WSTEC was directly involved in the sales and this land was subdivided for industrial sales. In another example, WSTEC gave back some land to villagers of Vaialele and Letogo and Lauili where there were “too many people and not enough land” (Laulu Fuataga, MP, personal communication, 1982).

It was interesting that when the subdivisions were carried out, the debate in the House of Parliament was “Who is going to buy these blocks of land?” and “Nobody wants this land, everybody has their customary land”. But these sections were quickly snapped up within a month. A Church Minister at the time commented that it was very unfortunate but “young people are flooding off the customary land because they had their own feelings of wanting their own land, plus being influenced from overseas”.

The Samoa Land Corporation (SLC), established in 1990, was charged with devising fair ways for dealing with lands vested in the government. This is a very complex exercise given the various claims. For example, the SLC had thoughts of giving back half of the Faleata Plantation to the village of Vaitele as a home base for village housing. The SLC had intended to sell the road frontages but, due to political fallout, this plan is on hold. A further complication is that the potential commercial value of this land to, for instance, the manufacturing plant Yazaki or some other such business venture, influences this decision.

The amount of freehold released by WESTEC sales on the market does not make a substantial difference to the total percentage of freehold land available. A small amount of church lands are also being sold and/or exchanged. For example, the Catholic Church exchanged some Apia land so as to build the Malie Catholic Centre.

### **Buying and selling freehold land today**

The case materials that follow focus on what land is being sold, who is selling, who is buying and why, how much is being paid, and how the sales are financed.

Table 2 traces the land sales by one land agent over a one-year period from April 1999 to April 2000. In this period a total of 16 pieces of land were sold. Ten sales comprised the breaking up

of large family blocks in Nuu and Suisega, which points to the growth of subdivisions on the fringes of the Apia urban area.

**Table 2 Land sales over a one year period 1999-2000 (n=16)**

	Site	Purchaser	ST \$	Funding
1	Ululoloa H&1/4 ac	Local (Family home)	150,000	Bank Loan
2	Nuu 1 acre	Local (Family home)	65,000	Cash
3	Nuu 1/2 acre	Local (Savaaii) (Apia base)	35,000	Cash
4	Nuu 1 acre	Local (Home)	60,000	Instalments (Sister in NZ assisted)
3	Mulifana 4 1/2 acres	Local (Recreation and fishing)	175,000	Cash (own other land)
4	Savalalo 1/4 acre	Local (Extend commercial property)	420,000	Bank loan for total price
5	Nuu 1 acre	Local (Investment)	65,000	Cash (Redundancy Pay)
6	Fugalei 1/2 acre	Local (Business purposes)	825,000	Cash T325,000 (Balance National Provident Fund (NPF) loan)
9	Savalalo 1/4 acre	Local (Extend commercial property)	420,000	Bank loan for total price
10	Nuu 1/2 acre	Local (Land for sons)	35,000	Cash (Solomons)
11	LeTava 1/4 acre	Pago Pago (Retire here)	50,000	Cash (Pago)
12	Nuu 1/2 acre	Hawaii (Retire/ brother will live)	35,000	Cash (US)
13	Vaivase H & acre	Australia (Holiday home, Parents)	275,000	Cash (Australia)
14	Suisega 1/4 acre	USA (Retire)	37,000	Cash (US)
15	Suisega 1/4 acre	LA (For parents)	40,000	Cash (US)
16	Suisega 3/4 acre	Local (Extend present property)	120,000	Bank Loan

The Table shows the great cost of land in Samoa today, as well as how prices varied according to factors such as desirability and distance from town for example. The data indicates the emergence of socio-economic residential zones — the differentiation of more desirable and less desirable land. The high prices of the commercial sites of Fugalei and Savalalo sites (Apia urban commercial sites) is also shown, at \$T420,000 per quarter acre.

Generally speaking, many of the sales were by *afakasis* (part-Samoans) (those already operating predominantly outside the traditional land system for example) and all of the buyers were Samoans who operated within the kinship networks. Note also that all of the advertised land was on Upolu — none on Savaii — which again reflects the location of the demand as well as availability of freehold land.

Next, the influence of migration and access to information is seen by looking at who is buying land and how this is being done. Nine of the 16 sales were locally generated and six were purchased by ‘outside’ Samoans. Some of the latter came to Samoa for a holiday, saw the advertisement in the paper, looked at the section and put down a deposit. Full cash price followed. The Australian purchase was by a woman who saw the advertisement in the *Samoana*, sent her family in Samoa around to look at the property and then decided to buy. The transaction, featuring cash from the Solomon Islands, involved an expatriate married to a Samoan. Even though the marriage had dissolved he still wanted some Samoan land for his sons.

A substantial number of these transactions were initiated, and carried out by phone and fax. This highlights the influence of communication technology today within the business world. Second, the influence of migrant remittances is clearly seen in the ways land was paid for. Of the 16 sales, one purchaser is paying by instalments with help from his sister in New Zealand. Others used bank loans and one purchase comprised half a bank loan and half cash. Five of the 11 paying cash were local (one using a redundancy payment) and the remaining six obtained funds from outside (four from USA, one from Australia and one from the Solomon Islands). One must question whether this money goes through the banking systems in the proper way — are there any paper trails? For example, most of this was paid in notes! There is often a feeling that notes are safer than cheques. People sometimes store money at home rather than put it in the bank. In one case, ST\$15,000 was needed and all *aiga* sisters and brothers brought this in a day (much dog-eared from lying under mattresses).

Third, the migration influence is also clearly seen in reasons for selling (Table 3) and buying land (Table 4). Table 3 shows seven sellers believed at this time they would not be returning to Samoa. However, a further three were selling land to build a house in Pago (American Samoa) while two needed money to pay school fees in the States. Two were selling this land to purchase other lands.



**Table 3 Reasons for selling (n=16 sales)**

Reason	No
MIGRATION (not intending to return)	
New Zealand	4
Utah	2
Australia	1
INCOME FOR PERSONAL NEEDS	
To meet financial commitments	1
To build a house (in Pago)	3
Pay school fees (in USA)	2
Short of cash	1
INCOME FOR INVESTMENT	
Funds to purchase other lands	2

Comments from sellers show some changes in family structures as well as family feelings about land.

I asked my children what shall we do with that land. It was my father's land. They said: 'mum, we have no feeling for that land ... it doesn't mean anything to us really. We aren't going to use it, ever. We need the money for other things. It is better to invest the money from land in other things today'.

My father, and then us, treasured that land. We made sure that land was handed down to our children — that we were giving them something. But when we gave the land to our children, they are cutting it up into pieces and selling it. It's very sad, but that's life really.

Table 4 sets out the reasons why people were buying; the wish for a person's own asset, for themselves now, for future retirement, or for a better life for their parents. Three blocks of land were purchased for business reasons. Two people were also buying land for their parents because of their sense of *alofa*, that is, to provide a better place for their parents to live so they did not have to worry about them and they could have comfort and love in old age.

**Table 4 Reasons for buying (n=16)**

Reason	Number
PERSONAL	
Want own home	3
Retire in the future	4
Town base (Savaii)	1
Extend our present home	1
Land children call their own	1
Recreation and fishing	1
PARENTS AND FAMILY	
A home for parents now	2
INVESTMENT	
Investments	1
Extend business	2

In the land agent's opinion the major reason for buying was people's wish for their own home – unencumbered, free from *matai* interference.

I need some land for my children ... land that the *matai* can't interfere with and which will be their own. That's why I am buying.

I live in New Zealand now, but I will probably come to live in Samoa to retire... it's much easier now with the pension. I don't think I'll live there all the time. But for now, I like a place to come and stay ... I don't want to stay in the village, or in the hotel. So I bought that land. My parents or my brothers' family can live there now, and when I come for holiday I will live there and then I'll retire there eventually.

### **Why a growing number of people want freehold land**

One of the reasons for the demand for freehold land is that customary land is not meeting peoples' needs. It is getting more difficult to access because in the old days if you wanted land you went to the chief and he gave you land for a project. Not any more — now when you go and ask for land, you have to wait. Furthermore, there are also some people who have no rights to customary land. For example, when their husbands pass away widows have no right to their husbands' land and should return to their village. Pastors are also outside the customary systems. So too are minority groups, such as Samoans of Solomon Islands and Tuvalu descent.

Another reason people want freehold land is because the ownership of customary land does not provide individuals with a legal title. Customary land cannot be used as collateral when negotiating loans from the bank. As people's needs and aspirations are changing, customary land appears to be of diminishing economic use to people. This raises questions about the social uses of customary land.

There is also a preference not to live in the village. On the one hand, there is the social pressures of living in the villages, but there is also the reality that many people now 'like their comforts' such as having a good house with hot and cold water, toilets and somewhere quiet to retreat to when desired. Others say that living in the village is 'too expensive'.

Samoans also want some resources free from *matai* interference, some things that can be passed onto one's children. The expressed wish to be free from *matai* interference is not just economic but may also be a desire to be free from the social and psychological interference of the *matai*. They want to make the land a resource to 'work' for them. This means land has to be bought. Here we can see both the influence of capital generated from outside Samoa and also the growing significance of capital generated from within Samoa. There has been growth in the size of Samoa's wage-dependent proletariat, some of whom have the money to buy land.

This raises the question about whether this is a divisive process. Is there emerging a social and an economic division between those who can and those who cannot buy resources? Is the demand for freehold land pushing up and maintaining high prices on the market because there is not much land available? What capital value does land have?

Although people want freehold land, perhaps this is also a reinforcement of customary values especially by sharing wealth in a tangible way. The love for parents and other family members extends to allowing them to live on freehold land as if it was customary land. Just because

someone has a freehold section with a house, it does not mean that they are isolated from their kin. One needs to look at how the house and section is used, who lives there for what periods of time and whether town offers a base for kin living further away.

Is there actually a dis-association between 'social' land and 'economic' land? Perhaps this duality is not real. When I concluded this case study, I felt that customary land is still highly valued, as are the related social systems. Many people see the pitfalls of customary land ownership and want to secure their land. To do this they are willing to maintain the safety and security of the political position of Samoans and to avoid the situation in Fiji. The only problem is that it is only those with capital and resources who can afford this view. What of those who need the land but can never purchase it?

### **The value of customary land**

Tanugamanono is an urban village that has maintained its customary land, and chiefly systems. This means nobody from outside the local families resides in this village. In the midst of Tanugamanono's customary land is a large tract of freehold land which is under the *pule* of the *Alii* and *Faipule* of Tanugamanono Village. How did this situation come about and how does the presence of this freehold land affect village families and village life today?

The Germans built an ice factory at the back of Tanugamanono village by the river and took a large swath of village land up the centre of the village leading down to this factory as well. This became freehold land. In 1956 the New Zealand Government donated 4.2 acres of this freehold land back to the *Alii* and *Faipule* of Tanugamanono for village use. The school was built on one acre and the rest lay intact under the *Matai's pule*. No piece of this freehold land was to be sold or used without the consent of all Tanugamanono *matai*. Furthermore, no one was allowed to live on this land without the full consent of all *matai*.

In the early 1970s the village decided to build a new church. Fundraising began in Samoa and also in New Zealand, Australia and the United States, where those with even the most distant links to Tanugamanono ran community fundraising dances, sold their obligatory quota of raffle tickets and doubled their remittances to support this village effort. Gifts from overseas included communion dishes, clocks, cabinets and wall hangings and a set of electronic church bells that could play five hymns. The opening was an impressive affair bringing together families from all over the globe.

Despite this wealth from abroad, a big mortgage at the bank was also taken out. After the opening, mortgage repayments were levied equally over all village families in the usual fashion. By 1979 these repayments hung like an albatross over the *matai* who were tired of being asked time and again for their contribution. The *Atoa* was also getting rather tired of asking. A good son (and nephew of the *Atoa*) in New Zealand, was contacted by the head *matai* (and then by his mother) for assistance to pay off the mortgage, offering one acre of this freehold land in return. This son had completed his secondary and tertiary education in New Zealand, and had a good degree and a good job. He had contributed substantially to the original fundraising. He and two of his brothers and sisters responded to the request, paid the outstanding mortgage and accepted the offer of one acre. Two other sisters supported this idea initially but then withdrew.

The land-transfer was signed by all *Alii* and *Faipule*, even a *Faipule* who was not part of the congregation and whose church was in dire financial trouble. The title was listed in the name of the mother because of the legal requirement that buyers could not own land until they had lived in Samoa for the past 21 months. She then willed the acre back to her three sons. The son built a magnificent *palagi* house on his share of the section and so did one sister. All funding for these homes came from New Zealand, a total cost of close to \$T200,000. Furniture and white goods from New Zealand were additional. The mother lived in her son's house and the sister and her husband returned from New Zealand to live in their house and mind their mother until she passed away.

Some time in 1993 the village again had need for funding, this time to fix up the school. And so, a half an acre of this freehold land was sold to an *auvaluma* (daughter of the village) for the sum of \$T12,000. Although the price was extremely cheap the *matai* feeling was that they should be generous to one of their own. There was some haziness about whether all *matai* signed the agreement and whether the land was properly surveyed and a title given. Older *matai* had passed away, and knowledge and recollections about the status of the land were similarly haphazard. Nevertheless the *auvaluma* built a new house on the site in good faith. Overall there seemed to be the idea that if other village families wanted to purchase this freehold land and build this was in order. In 1999 this perception was severely shaken. The news came that the village school was going to be rebuilt through an ADB loan and the village must build a suitable fence.

When the *matai* went to survey where the fence should go, they found the *auvaluma's* new house was squarely within the school boundary. The *auvaluma* was asked if she would consent to move her front fences back and take more land at the back of her house. Shortly after however, the village was intrigued by an advertisement in the paper for the sale of a house and section in Tanugamanono for \$T160,000. They were especially surprised when they found that the house for sale was this very house. A furor erupted through the village and the *matai* stopped the sale. Their view was that she had been given this land very cheaply and was now making a big profit from its sale. Should the *matai* (and the village) have some of the profit from this sale? But more importantly, how could she sell this customary land (although freehold) and what would be the implications of someone other than family coming to live in the village? This idea was untenable. However, on closer review, the legality of the sale itself came under question. Had all *Alii* and *Faipule* of the village signed their agreement to the sale? The case rested here in June 2000.

### **Concluding points**

Land remains critically important in Samoa even as nuclear family land with private title rather than land with joint owners from within the wider family. There is not a breakdown of the *fa'a Samoa* but there is definitely an erosion of social and economic ties as the times that people come together are changing. Being physically close together on one part of land is still important but it does not need to be on customary land. People are building permanent houses, planting crops and passing these on to their children. Land is ceasing to be the binding point and is being replaced, for some Samoans at least, by cash as witnessed by the increase in store-bought commodities in ceremonial exchanges. But this does not mean the feelings towards land are in anyway lessened.

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## Appendices

**Table A1: Property for Sale, *Observer* Jan-Dec 1980 by listings**

Date	Description	Locality	Price ST \$	Advertiser
Jan 31	1/4 acre 1/2 acre & house	Alafua		Lawyer
April 17	1/4 acre	Alafua		Private
April 17	3/4 acre & house 1/4 acre & house 1/2 acre & house 4 1/2 acre 8 1/4 acres 3/4 corner 4 1/4 acre 1/4 1/2 1/4 Block 4 acres 10 acre blocks (3)  1/4	Vaivasetai Moamoatai Siusega Siusega Siusega Siusega Mt Vaea Vaivasetai Vinifou Vaivesetai Vailima Vaiaata, Savaii  Saleufi	80,000 42,000 10,500 7,300 3,500 Offers/ urgent 6,500 6,000 10,000 4,700 Offers 5,000 cash per block/ deposit T1500, T20 per wk T25,000 (reduced from 28,000)	Afoa Land Agent
June 12	1/4	Vaitele	3,400	Private
July 3	1 acre	Mt Vaea	25,000	Private
Sept 11	2 1/2 & house	Lelata		Lawyer
Sept 18	2 1/2 2 1/2 1/4 & buildings 3/4 8 1/2 1/4	Faga Tuasivi Eveeve Lalomalava Salelamala Vailili		O F Nelson
Sept 18	1/4 & house  28 sections 1/2 acre 1/4 acre 1 acre	Tuaefu Tiafau Moamoa Siusega Ululoloa Papauta Afiamalu	37,000 13,000 per 1/4 6,000 per 1/4 3,500 per 1/4 7300 per 1/2 4,500 8,200	Afoa Land Agent
Oct 9	5 acres & house	Nil	Nil	Private
Oct 30	1/2 acre	Ululoloa	9,000	Private
Nov 20	1/2 acre & house	Nil	75,000	Private
Nov 27	1 acre/ poumuli	Nuu	16,000 1/2 4,000	Private
Nov 27	13 entries			Afoa Land Agent
Dec 4	10 1/4 acre	Lelata Subdivision	Nil	Private
Dec 23	19 entries			Afoa Land Agent

Analysis:	Listings for one year	69	Jan-June	17
	Land Agent (1)	51	July-Dec	52
	Private Individual	8		
	Nelsons (company)	15		
	Lawyer	2		

**Table A2: Property for Sale, *Observer* 4 June, 2000 by listings**

<b>Sellers</b>	<b>Law firm</b>	<b>Real Estate</b>	<b>Private</b>
	MVR Peteru 2	Impak Real Estate 5	Individual 14
	Leung Wai 1		
	Drake 1	Samoa Realty 4	Commercial 2
	Fepuleai 9		
		Nat Prop Sales 18	
TOTAL 46 entries	13	27	16
<b>BLOCKS</b>	<b>RANGE</b>		
42 x 5 acre Tiavi T100,000	House, 3/4 block Ululoloa T375,000		
10 acres Mulifanua T 80,000			
Saleimoa 2 and 4 acres T50,000 and T90,000			

**Table A3: Residential building permits issued 1985-99**

Year	Number of units	Value (in ST 1000)
1985	125	2,292
1986	144	2,667
1987	138	3,266
1988	209	4,476
1989	196	4,830
1990	206	4,217
1991	259	5,978
1992	372	12,226
1993	429	12,415
1994	409	9,180
1995	343	7,749
1996	406	10,562
1997	372	11,004
1998	324	9,616
1999	336	11,789

Source: Table E3 Central Bank Reports, 1985-1999



## **Changes and Choices in Tonga: the Significance of Conspicuous Construction**

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“Goods are part of a live information system” (Douglas and Isherwood 1979: 100)

Once upon a time in Pacific Island groups such as Tonga it was easy to see who was the most important person in a community. The aristocrat's or chief's house was the biggest in a village, as it was used not only for family needs (eating, sleeping, storage) but also to house numbers of retainers and to entertain visitors. For a time (mid-nineteenth to early decades of the twentieth century) the largest houses were those of foreign government representatives, missionaries and prosperous part-European traders. Both in the early and latter parts of the twentieth century some aristocrats in Tonga had built large, wooden-walled and tin-roofed European-style homes. Today the more prosperous farmers, traders and migrants are demonstrating their worldly success by building homes which, in most cases, surpass in size those of the aristocrats. Large sums of money (given average earnings) are expended on large church buildings.

The homes of Tongans (and of many other indigenous people in the nations of the South Pacific) have changed from being protective shelters, which demonstrated particular cultural traditions, aesthetics and craft skills in their construction, to commodities which symbolise other values. Unlike Samoa there are very few traditional style buildings with oval-shaped roofs left in Tonga. In any case most traditional Tongan houses had enclosed sides, in contrast to the open-sided Samoan *fales*.<sup>1</sup>

In 2000 a new European-style house not only demonstrates a household head's care for his family, but also symbolically demonstrates a family's commitment to modernity and local ideas of progress (cf. Wendt 1973, Bocock 1993: 75, Macpherson 1994: 94), their level of prosperity, and their commitment to the community value of hard work. The exterior and interior decoration of the house, the interior layout, the type of furniture which a family has acquired, the creation, design and content of home gardens, are all signifiers, not least of the acceptance of change in how aspects of identity and social position are expressed.

The changes in house styles can be taken as evidence of social change as well as evidence of the effects of inter-cultural transfers of modernising influences at a micro-level. The increased ability of people to purchase goods overseas, whether as migrants or because of increases in their local earnings is one factor contributing to the observable changes in the lifestyle of many individuals. Another influence, which can be attributed to migration, is the local spread of new ideas about house- and church-building and aesthetics, represented by the arrangement of the home and church environment. The new houses and churches are in sharp contrast to the majority of Tongan homes.

## Changes and concerns — modernity versus conservation

In 1977 Epeli Hau'ofa published a prophetic book on the effect on natural resources in Tonga if the population of towns continued to rapidly increase, and increased quantities of rock, old coral and soil were quarried for house and road bases. He observed the depredation of beach sand, used for grave mounds, but also in building of various kinds (Hau'ofa 1977: 4-6). Much of what he observed in the 1970s has accelerated, with a dramatic increase in encroachments into the two mangrove-fringed Tongatapu lagoons. Some of the increase is due to the funding of infrastructural improvements by overseas government aid programmes. Some is due to church building programmes, and some to the increase in new house building.

Internal migration in Tonga of people, particularly from the island groups of Ha'apai and the Niuaus, has increased pressure on the ecological fabric of the land area, and on the infrastructure and services of the capital Nuku'alofa. There are no formal local government organisations responsible for the management of infrastructure and planning in the three major towns of Tonga (Nuku'alofa, Tongatapu; Pangai, Lifuka, Ha'apai; and Neiafu, Vava'u). The last two island groups do have Development Committees, linked to the Government of Tonga's Central Planning Committee. There is no rating system and most of the town allotments are owned by aristocrats ('nobles') and the King and leased to the occupiers.<sup>2</sup> Road maintenance has tended to be *ad hoc*; repairs of pavements and the sprucing up of town buildings in Nuku'alofa tend to be done to coincide with the King's birthday each July, or elsewhere with royal visits.

Some of the private building construction, and the building of new churches and church halls, has been handled by medium to large foreign-owned companies. However, untrained builders and family and volunteer labour are heavily involved in both house- and church-construction. The "lack of adequate building codes and land use regulations is especially significant" (Candler 1997: 101, 102).

House building has been financed by bank loans<sup>3</sup> and by monies earned locally, or in recent years by money earned by emigrants and closely related family members in Australia, the USA, and in New Zealand. Church-building has been funded by a combination of monies annually collected in the *misinale*<sup>4</sup> collections in Tonga and obtained from migrant groups overseas and remitted to Tonga. The devices used to obtain the money from migrants include individuals spending some months away in Australia, the USA and New Zealand visiting church kava circles, by touring concert parties, and by family members in Tonga requesting large sums from relatives living overseas.

The transformation of productive agricultural land into house allotments in the Nuku'alofa suburb of Tofoa has speeded up. This has involved the sale by farmers of inheritable land sections, originally measuring 8 1/4 acres.<sup>5</sup> This acreage will yield 28 or 29 town allotments each of 750 square metres. Such lots currently fetch Tonga Pa'anga (TP)\$8,500 to TP\$10,000 each, giving the farmer a return, after expenses such as the cost of a survey of approximately TP\$280,000. The homes in this area are mostly large two-storeyed residences with attractive gardens. The Tuscan-style house of the Crown Prince dominates a hill close to Tofoa.

A number of newer homes, mostly assembled from modules purchased in the USA, have been built in villages in the western (Hihifo) district of Tongatapu. In each case the noble on whose estate the land is located has agreed to lease the house-lot and a 50-year lease agreement has been registered with the Ministry of Lands.

As I have noted, one of the most disturbing trends connected with house- and church-building in Tonga is the prodigious use of quarried old coral to raise house-sites prior to building and as a base for other constructions.<sup>6</sup> Even if the house is not located in a low-lying area, it is considered desirable that the ground be raised 0.6 m. This requires about 2.68 cubic metres of fill. The price per truckload in early 2000 was TP\$45.00 and the total cost of the fill to cover an area of 30 square metres was about TP\$5000. There is the additional cost of labour to spread the fill. Church buildings, which occupy larger pieces of ground than do houses, require considerably more fill.

Large quantities of old coral rock have also been used to reclaim sections of the shores of the lagoons of Fanga Kaukau/Fanga'Uta in the centre of Tongatapu, particularly in a suburb of Nuku'alofa and in the villages of Ha'ateiho and Pea. Such reclamations are also randomly scattered around the two lagoons. Reclamation has enabled the subdivision of lagoon foreshores for housing development, for the construction of jetties and raised platforms and for recreational use. This has involved the removal of large quantities of mangroves. One area on the southern shores of Fanga'Uta has been designated for agriculture, in spite of the fact that the area is subject to tidal flooding.

Ellison (1998b), who has conducted a long-term study of mangroves in Tonga, states that there were 1000 hectares of mangroves in Tonga 20 years ago. She has reported that "This has since been reduced by clearance and conversion to other uses" (Ellison 1998b: 3). Advice suggesting the cessation of such activities had been available from local environmental officers for some years and from consultants funded by UNESCO (United Nations 1990: 31-8), but seems to have been ignored by those responsible for approving applications. The Tongan mangrove communities previously had the nominal protection of the 1934 Birds and Fish Preservation Act which made the cutting or removal of mangroves illegal.

One of the problems is that, according to James (1998a: 193), the subdivision of Nuku'alofa swamplands for housing had been approved in 1982. In June 2000 a proposed Bill, the Environmental Impact Assessment Bill, was still being circulated before being presented to Parliament. Consultants managing a long-term Australian aid-funded project, the Tongan Environmental Management and Protection Project (TEMPP), have regularly forwarded reports and recommendations to their hosts, the Ministry of Lands. TEMPP have devised a broad programme for improved local management. Their researchers have been accumulating evidence to demonstrate the importance of discontinuing mangrove forest clearance.

The protection of the water and foreshores of the two lagoons is a particular focus of their work. This protection programme would include maintenance of existing mangrove forests, the lessening of eutrophication (nutrient enrichment resulting in excessive algal growth) caused by pollution, lessening of sources of pollution, such as runoff from domestic washing and sewage, dumping of rubbish and silting. Linked to these aims is the planning of better management of solid waste disposal. There is evidence of a diminution in fish catches and the removal of mangroves will further seriously affect the breeding of fish and other sea life (cf. Ellison 1998a).

The loss of mangroves has not been seen as a vital matter by members of the Tongan Parliament. One former People's Representative told me that when he raised the issue he was received with jeering and laughter and the comment "We thought you were concerned about the welfare of people – now you tell us you are worried about mangroves and fish!" A Noble MP told me he was not aware of the work of TEMPP as, to his knowledge, reports on the Project have not been

given to Parliament. South Pacific Regional Environmental Program (SPREP) Wetlands Action Plans also do not seem to have had much impact. Mangroves are not particularly attractive trees and the muddy environment in which they grow is even less so. Modernisation of the town and village environment is seen as a desirable occurrence and the loss of mangroves will give tidier looking foreshores.

A seminar presented to TEMPP by a senior civil servant on major environmental issues in Tonga concluded “that a number of environmental issues were beyond the scope of the project, *being inherent in legislative and land tenure systems*” (my italics). Although the Ministry of Lands intends to bring in legislation to legalise the already existing encroachments on the lagoons, there seems to be little will to take swift action.

### **Consuming ideas and goods**

Consumption is a process which is not simply economic; it is not just about obtaining a good and using it. Consumption has also been defined as a “social, cultural and symbolic activity” (Bocock 1993). It can be construed as part of people’s “impression management” (Goffman 1958: 152), part of their presentation of self. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) asserts that consumption is about people’s acquisition of social and cultural capital. He used the ownership of certain goods by individuals in France in the 1970s as a marker of class differentiation.

Much of the earlier, costly expenditure by the Tongan families resident overseas was for motor vehicles, essential for transport to work and church, rent and furniture. In addition to gifts of cash many goods such as refrigerators, televisions, video players, and gas stoves were sent to Tonga as gifts to improve the lot of parents and close family members left behind. Many people also aspired to build a new home for their parents or to improve the existing house. The style of these homes was mostly of the basic, wooden-sided, iron-roofed, three bedroom bungalow seen in many Australian and New Zealand suburbs. The givers demonstrated their commitment to the traditional ideology of respecting and valuing parents and other members of their natal families, and their continuing commitment and honouring of their home places. This is also true of Samoan emigrants. Cluny Macpherson (1994: 4) quotes a Samoan informant:

When my cousin returned from Samoa with photos of the house we had built for my parents we were so proud. We were so happy that we cried. I don’t want to seem proud but that house was one of the nicer homes in the village. Only the pastor’s house was better.

In the case of the homes built for parents in Tonga by migrants the houses were often of better quality than that of the church ministers.

How non-European people assimilate ideas about what goods should be owned, how they should be used and displayed, and how the domestic environment should be arranged, has been little studied. Obvious influences on choice-making include television programmes and advertising, department store displays and other people’s homes. Most emigrant Tongans are not in the habit of buying magazines such as *Home Beautiful* or *House and Garden* which lay down the ever-changing rules about the layout and content of house interiors and of gardens.

### **What ‘Isaac’ swept away – hurricanes and housing**

As emigrant Tongans have experienced and become more comfortable in ‘*palangi* space’, their tastes have become more sophisticated. This has had an effect in the home communities. The changeover in choice of house architecture during the last two decades is particularly striking. In 1982 many houses of traditional design were destroyed in Cyclone Isaac and were replaced, courtesy of New Zealand Government aid, by small, rectangular wooden houses with galvanised iron roofs. Campbell (1992: 212) states that 40 per cent of buildings in the Vava’u group were damaged or destroyed, 95 per cent in Ha’apai, and 80 per cent on Tongatapu. The ‘hurricane houses’ have the appearance of the type of house which appears in children’s drawings with a window either side of the front door. The kitchen was usually separate and was often a roughly built shelter of tree boughs, thatched with palm leaves.

People who have talked to me over the years about their experiences during Hurricane Isaac, particularly in Ha’apai, spoke of the surges that washed everything they owned out to sea. In the southern village of the island of Uiha the villagers took shelter in the Mormon church, the only building which was slightly elevated above ground level, and which was built of concrete blocks.

Houses, cars, buses, piles of pandanus mats and tapa cloth, furniture, photographs, all were washed out to sea. After Isaac people were Tongan in body and mind, and in relationship to a place, but any houses or even churches which had demonstrated a historic Tongan identity had mostly gone. So Isaac was a catalyst of drastic change, not just a precipitant of internal and external migration.

In Samoa, some members of the urban bourgeoisie and the middle-class elite, can point to the existence of numerous traditional *fale* in villages and in Apia and say “We are not poor because we still value *fa’a Samoa*” [the Samoan way of doing things, i.e. tradition]. While Samoan traditional houses may not always be well-built and the families may be cash poor, the houses do exemplify an attachment to, and maintenance of a tradition. In Tonga today the traditional house, of which there are approximately five per cent remaining, is taken as a signifier of poverty rather than an identity marker.

The congregations who have recently built churches have deliberately displaced the old, traditional style. In one case an oval-roofed section of a village church was used to build a beach house for the King. The King himself has advocated some extremely modern styles and materials for new churches.

### **The new houses**

Forty years on from when the first large groups of emigrants began moving abroad some expatriate Tongans have returned to build new houses for themselves. Where once only hereditary aristocrats, and later a small number of people with higher than average incomes, had large, sometimes grandiose homes, now emigrants, mostly resident in the USA, are constructing large two-storey, cement-walled houses. In the main these houses are constructed from modules or kits, imported from the USA or from New Zealand. The local reactions to these constructions are mixed and sometimes libellous.

While the migrant is claiming a rise in social status (cf. Miller 1987: 204; Bocock 1993: 64) the levelling tendency among Tongans comes to the fore among others in the community. To be perceived as '*fie maolunga*' (lit. going high) is seen as an individual attempting to claim more status and respect than that to which he or she is entitled. Commonly people assert that the owners of the new homes must have obtained the money dishonestly.

In order to protect the privacy of the owners only a broad outline can be given of the narratives of acquisition of the newer homes built in the western (Hihifo) district of Tongatapu, the suburbs known as Tofoa and Anana in Nuku'alofa, scattered through other suburbs of Nuku'alofa and in outer Neiafu in Vava'u. The average value of the houses in the Hihifo district, when completed, ranged from TP\$60,000 to TP\$100,000. In a number of cases the finance for the house had been obtained in cities on the west coast of the USA in a variety of ways: compensation payment for an industrial accident, an insurance payment to a widow following the death of her husband, money earned by Sumo wrestling, money earned in a landscaping business. In other cases one house is owned by a rugby player who was contracted to a European club, another financed by gifts of close relatives in Australia and in the USA, and another by money earned from kava sales in Australia and in the USA. In a number of cases the houses were standing empty, as the owner had gone back to America to earn more money, or in two cases were being completed with the aim of them being rented to well-off foreign workers.

The house styles chosen are rather elaborate and not particularly suitable for the Tongan weather conditions. These new houses will require a great deal of maintenance in order to prevent the timber rotting due to heavy rains and to humidity which causes mildew. Although the house modules, which may fill five or six containers, are sent with a plan, this does not mean this will be followed by the receiver, whether a relative of the owner or the builder. I had been informed this had been the situation in several instances. In one case the relative acting as agent and go-between decided the house would be improved if more porches could be added. An American builder whom I consulted pointed out that some windows were wrongly placed.

The large homes in Tofoa, some of which had a value in excess of TP\$200,000, were mostly owned by successful business proprietors or professional people. Some were modular homes and some architect-designed. This was also the case in the suburb of Anana, which is located on the western shores of the lagoon, and which also contains a large, new 'luxury' apartment block. In all situations, whether the grander houses are scattered in the suburbs or in villages, the new homes stand in contrast to the houses occupied by less well-off Tongan families.

The 1996 Tongan census revealed that:

out of the total 16,194 households in Tonga, 10,760 or 66.4 percent of households lived in European type houses made of wood, 3,154 or 19.5 percent of households lived in European type houses made of bricks or cement [mostly cement blocks], 1,110 households or 6.8 percent lived in Tongan styled houses with thatch roof and thatch walls, 502 or 3.1 percent of households lived in Tongan style houses with thatch roof and wooden walls, 365 or 2.3 percent of households had Tongan style houses with iron roof and thatch walls, and 303 or 1.9 percent of households had other types of houses not mentioned above (Kingdom of Tonga 1999:5).

There is a remarkably low rental rate — that is, it is remarkable compared say to figures on rentals and ownership of houses in Australia or New Zealand. According to the 1996 Census 13,187 (81.4 per cent of the total of 16,194 households) owned their own home (Kingdom of Tonga 1999: 10).

Iron roofs are important for those households (58.3 per cent of the total number) who have a water tank, whether made of cement or fibreglass (Kingdom of Tonga 1999: 6). While 'European type house' reads rather grandly most of those made with wood are probably 'hurricane houses'. The increase in water tanks or an improvement in town or village water supplies must have contributed to the dramatic increase in the number of people reporting ownership of showers. The number jumped from 1,305 in 1986 to 13,259 in 1996 (Kingdom of Tonga 1999: 12).

### **A preference for churches**

A large number of the hurricane houses have been poorly maintained, but this applies to most houses. People's priorities for income use — to put food on the table, pay children's school fees and buy their school uniforms, and give to their church — means that there is little left over for purchase of paint, nails, roofing, doors, louvres, and timber. Ideas of a pleasing appearance of a house or of what Europeans might consider comfort do not dominate most people's thinking although some families maintain attractive home gardens. 'Taste', even among the very well off (cf. Bayley 1991), is not yet a value for most people.

Energy, devotion, sacrifice and aesthetic expression are exemplified in the new churches which are being built in villages and in town suburbs. The most striking contrast of church-buildings and homes is found in the Nuku'alofa suburb of Popua. Popua is in two parts. The houses in one part extend along a spit of land at the extreme end of the Nuku'alofa area. It is possible to wade at low tide from the spit to a nearby island, Nukunukumotu. Most of the dwellings in the eastern side of Popua are surrounded by water, as the area is a coastal wetland, with mangroves the main vegetation. This swamp is edged by the lagoon on two sides. James (1998a: 193) reports that 396 town allotments measuring 760 metres were designated in this area in 1982 and by 1990 up to 120 residences had been built there. The house sites have been established, at considerable cost, by the dumping of tonnes of quarried coral rubble. The narrow roads which divide the swamp dwellers are also built of coral rubble at the expense of the homeowners.

In interviews with government officials, residents and others I expressed my surprise that the Government, represented by Ministry of Lands officials, would sanction the taking up of leases in a swamp, some of which is affected by tidal movements. The local reaction was amusement. It was pointed out to me that there was little freehold or government land available in the environs of Nuku'alofa and that poorer people could not afford to buy house lots from private owners or give gratuities to nobles in exchange for the lease of a piece of land. Concerns about the depredation of the mangroves were dismissed by government officials, residents and others.

An extensive area at the southern end of Tongatapu, Halo'ovave, close to the suburb of Sopu, is also a swampy area, but is not next to the lagoon. Halo'ovave had a similar settlement history to that of Popua (see Dillon 1983). Some of the water problems of Halo'ovave and in the areas known as Puke and Hofoa will be relieved by a drainage scheme in Sopu, funded by the Government of Japan. However, many districts of Tongatapu, including Halo'ovave and Popua, have extensive waterlogged areas following heavy rains.

Most of the interviews in Popua were done two days after a storm surge, caused by a cyclone, had gone across the area from the northeast of the lagoon. What was remarkable was how quickly households had dealt with the aftermath of mud and water. All those interviewed stated that the

main problems encountered in living in a swampy area were quantities of flies and mosquitoes, the strong smells of stagnant water and mud, sea surges, intermittent water supply, increased water and mud surrounding dwellings after rain, and dumping of rubbish. Both Popua and Halo'ovave would be catalysts if dengue, typhoid and cholera, which are endemic in Tonga, became epidemic.

In communities of internal migrants, such as Popua, there appears to be less dependence on remittances for housing assistance (at least few would admit it) whereas 15 years ago such assistance was proudly stated by residents in Nuku'alofa. Household heads utilised bank loans and savings from family members' wages and earnings from trading, particularly from sales of agricultural produce. Some employed men had taken three months' leave from their work in Tonga and had earned some money overseas. Any monies sent from relatives abroad were dedicated to the church. All were proud of their achievement in obtaining housing. Descriptions of three households are given in the Appendix.

Internal emigrants, such as those interviewed from Nuiabo'u and Ha'apai, tend to be clustered in enclaves with relatives or people from the same island. The churches are not only additionally unifying for extended families and friends, they are a base for traditional craft and food exchanges and for corporate gifting activities, such as the preparation of feast tables for community functions.

After a week of earning a living — farmers, public servants, teachers, market vendors, crafts makers, poor and prosperous Tongans alike — Sunday is anticipated. Poorer Tongans perform a Sunday miracle — they turn out in immaculate clothing — the girls often elaborately dressed in frilly white frocks sent from overseas; the little boys in long sleeved shirts, a bow tie and neat shorts or a wrapper.

The day of rest is also a day of work — prayer, singing, listening and cooking — a break from everyday life. The routines are similar — the church at 5 a.m. and 10 a.m., a heavy lunch (fish if possible, yam, *lupulu* [corned beef with coconut cream and onion in green leaf such as taro], cooked banana and papaya, perhaps some fried chicken). Sunday School at 2 p.m. and evening service at 5 p.m. Most of the household take a siesta between lunch and the evening service.

The interior decor of churches is carefully chosen. The light fittings are often elaborate chandeliers. There are colourful displays of plastic or real flowers in the sanctuary area. In the Protestant churches this houses the large, raised pulpit and, below this, a table (i.e. altar) covered with a lace cloth. There may be a stained glass window above the pulpit. In the newer church buildings there is often little that is clearly Tongan in origin, apart from say carvings on the pulpit, mats in the sanctuary or perhaps a mural. The environment is attractive to the members' eyes. It is clean and mostly well maintained. Newer churches have glazed tiled floors, older buildings wood, perhaps with linoleum. Most people remove their shoes before entering. Many church members may spend eight hours during the week (six hours of services and two hours of choir practice) and three to four hours on Sundays in the building.

It seems that little of the pride and pleasure which many people take in the clean and tidy environment of the church buildings carries over to their homes. Housekeeping is often somewhat cursory. Women have other preoccupations and occupations. As noted previously, many of the older houses in Tongan villages have not been well maintained. While an actual island environment such as that of Vava'u may be beautiful, the untidy, shack-like appearance of most village homes, not screened by garden bushes, detracts from the scene. This has an effect on



tourist opinion. Many tourists will not repeat their visit to Tonga because of the apparent poverty of the people exemplified in the unpicturesque appearance of villages, compared, say, to many in Samoa. Aid programs intended to help boost tourism are nullified by this situation.

The data in the 1996 Census of Tonga clearly indicates there had been a notable increase over the preceding decade in people's ownership of material goods such as vehicles, refrigerators, television sets, video decks, radios and bicycles (Kingdom of Tonga 1999: 12). It can be surmised that many of these items are second-hand and family members living overseas have gifted many. However, the majority of households use firewood for cooking, although many also have bottled gas stoves. Nevertheless there is a great deal of hidden poverty, particularly in rural areas where people are dependent on subsistence farming and fishing but need cash. Rural women work hard producing craft goods to keep their households economically viable.

## **Conclusion**

Those individuals who have engaged in conspicuous consumption by building large homes have attracted the envy and even malice of some, partly because it is felt that commoners should not attempt to rise above their social position. In addition some of the criticism directed at them involves the idea that in giving so much to themselves they have chosen to ignore the vital Tongan priorities — duty (to God, church, King and country), obedience to Christian precepts as they are interpreted locally, and respect.

The difference between the well off and the poor is becoming more identifiable in Tonga, in part through the way in which people are housed. Many older Tongans predicted that values would change due to modern influences, away from a commitment to the collective towards a commitment to individualism. This change is reflected to some extent in the type of new homes being built. Given the local acceptance of the currently fashionable free market philosophy, as well as limited emigration opportunities for the present generation, the gaps between the prosperous and the less prosperous are becoming more obvious.

## Endnotes

1. However, Helu (1999:323) in his discussion of material culture in Tonga, has used an illustration taken from Dumont D'Urville's report of his visit in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, depicting a *fale* Faka-Manuka, which was very similar to Samoan houses, but had partially open sides and few roof support posts. Helu considers the *fale* Faka-Manuka (*fale* Manu'a) was adopted in Tonga in the late 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century of the present era. In photographs of 20<sup>th</sup> century houses recorded in the 1930s, 1950s and 1960s, the buildings have lost much of the grace of the original form. Campbell (1992: 213) states that by the 1980s "Few Tongans lived in traditional housing".
2. See James (1998a) for a thorough discussion of the complicated land ownership and leasing system in Tonga.
3. Bank of Tonga loans for housing totalled almost TP\$16.5 million in 1998 and in 1999 TP\$20 million (Bank of Tonga 1998 Report, 12 & 19; Bank of Tonga 1999 Report 12 & 19).
4. The *misinale* is an annual church collection in the Free Wesleyan, Church of Tonga, Free Church of Tonga and Catholic churches. Monthly contributions by families are combined with one final collection at a special church service. Money for presentation at this final service is solicited from relatives overseas. The amounts rise exponentially each year.
5. Under the Tongan Constitution of 1875 an eldest son of a family could claim 8 1/4 acres (for use as an *api uta*, farm) on reaching the age of 16. This land could be inherited by one of the man's sons, but not by his wife or any of his daughters. With the increase in population it has become virtually impossible for such allocations to be made.
6. The Ministry of Lands obtains a considerable annual income from the mining and sale of beach sand. In 1998, 10,635 tons were mined, 5,565 tons from one beach alone. This mining has caused the acceleration of coastal erosion of the beaches used (Kingdom of Tonga 1999: 28). The sand is not ideal for use in construction, having a high salt content, but is also used for fill and for grave mounds.

## Appendix

### Household 1

The parents were absent, living on their farm plot in Ha'apai. The household consisted of an elderly aunt (MS), a young woman in her early twenties, working as a clerk, two younger sisters (one running a small store (*fale koloa*) located in front of the house and the other a senior school student), and one brother in his twenties. The household has the use of a truck and a car. One defunct car sat outside the house. The house was constructed of concrete blocks and wooden siding, had five bedrooms, and a concrete-floored and iron-roofed verandah. There is a large living room at the front, the width of the house, and two bedrooms are entered from this. The remaining three rooms are off a small hall that leads to the kitchen. The family have access to town water and also have a water tank (*vai sima*). The house has an interior bathroom and toilet. The pattern of acquisition was as follows:

1982: Three elder children sent from Ha'apai to school in Tongatapu (TT) stayed with relatives.

1986: Parents came to TT; selected piece of ground in Popua — 30 sq. metres. Bought quantity of coral fill, built house and then registered (in second son's name as father already had a farm lot (*api uta*) registered in his name) and eldest son planned to claim an *api uta* also. Cost of registration at that time was TP\$30.00 for a 50-year lease. All building costs were met from family earnings; originally from farm produce. Father would return periodically to Ha'apai to cultivate the farm. House and store are insured for TP\$30,000. Father's brother is living in USA — the household received TP\$3000 from him in 1999.

### Household 2

Male head of house born in Ha'apai, adopted by a Tongatapu family in 1963 when in early teens. Married twice, living in house with second wife and three children, eldest girl 16. He owns a truck and a car, farms leased land at Longoteme on TT (18 acres, annual rent TP\$5000 p.a.) and in Ha'apai, eight acres. In 1984 he leased a house lot in Popua (30 sq. meters); land registered in his name. Lived in house with first wife and children. He said he was told to build the house first, then register land lease with the Ministry of Lands. ("It was an order"). At that time cost of lease TP\$30.00. Initially used 20 truckloads of coral @ TP\$30.00 per load = TP\$600. The first part of house cost TP\$6000 to build, gradually added to it — insured for TP\$50,000. He claimed all built from own earnings; no money from overseas.

The interior of house had one small bedroom which had windows close to ceiling for air and plywood door. The main room was furnished with the parents' double bed, mattress and sprung base, to left, against wall of small bedroom. There was a large area of open floor. Two wooden dressing tables were located opposite each other, one against the exterior wall, one miniature billiard table, a couch, also an electric iron, CD player, television. The floor was covered with blue oilcloth. The kitchen was separated from the main room by a partition and had a gas stove and cupboards for china. The left-hand wall was decorated with two turtle shells. This man funded his daughter's 16th birthday party on a Sunday morning after church. This was attended by 70 people and the two main tables had the usual roasted suckling pigs and a variety of vegetables and cooked dishes.

### Household 3

Small two-bedroom hurricane-style house with kitchen. Wife and eldest daughter home. Husband (a policeman) was in Australia, working as a labourer, while on three-months leave, to earn money to help pay off a bank loan of TP\$3000, which was borrowed to build a store (*fale koloa*) in front of house. The wife was from Niuafu'ou; she met and married her husband in Niuafu'ou in 1983.

The land was bought from the Free Wesleyan Church (FWC) by first owner in 1987 (it is adjacent to the Vaipopua FWC church). The first owner built first part of house for a cost of TP\$2000. Property sold to husband in 1989 for TP\$5000. Lease registration TP\$40. Land is registered in eldest son's name. (He is 17.)

The couple did not have to take a loan to buy a house as the husband had been overseas (in Australia) previously to earn money. However, he took a bank loan of TP\$3000 to build the *fale koloa*, a small shed with an iron skillion roof. The loan is being paid off by automatic payment of money deducted from husband's pay as a policeman each month.

This family had some furniture, including a sideboard, and a television set. No chairs or couches. Blue linoleum on floor. Photos and turtle shell on wall. Sea surge had gone right through house on Thursday March 9, 2000.

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## ***THE PACIFIC IN NEW ZEALAND***

### **Some Changes and Continuities in the Gardening Practices of Samoans in Aotearoa/New Zealand**

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#### **Introduction**

The UNESCO-sponsored workshop on migration and environmental change is timely in the Pacific region as we journey into the new millennium. It is appropriate that the venue for the workshop is Apia, capital of Samoa in the heart of Polynesia. It is fitting also that it has been sponsored by UNESCO and co-ordinated by experts and personnel from various organisations, including staff of the National University of Samoa (NUS), the University of the South Pacific (USP), and some academics from New Zealand educational institutions. I say appropriate because the migration process that has resulted in the movement of large numbers of Samoans to countries, especially New Zealand and the United States, during the last four or five decades needs to be examined and analysed from a Samoan perspective.

Several academics, including some of the noted scholars who are present here at this workshop, have been fascinated by and have written about the global movements of the Samoan population over the last few decades. Sutter's (1989) account of the Samoans as a global family is an example of the mobility of the Samoan population at an earlier stage of the migration process. More recently, Dr Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop and others have written from within the cradle of the Samoan migration on socio-cultural aspects of Samoan development. Others like my colleague and mentor, Associate Professor Cluny Macpherson of the Sociology Department, University of Auckland, have studied the Samoan migration process for years (see, for example, Macpherson 1974, 1994, 1997, 1999). Cluny has been an avid observer and regular commentator on Samoan migration (and remittances) and the formation of viable Samoan diasporic communities including those in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Exploring the changes and continuities in the gardening practices of Samoans within a Samoan diasporic community is one way of looking at how Samoans, who have made their 'homes away from home', have transformed their environmental, social, economic, and cultural practices in their adopted homelands.

A few years ago I came across a paper entitled, 'Preserving Western Samoa's Cultural Heritage and Environment' by Dr Le'ulu Felise Va'a (n.d.) of the NUS in which Le'ulu made the following observations:

New Zealand's liberal immigration policies towards Western Samoa have had the effect of assisting Western Samoan economic development by reducing the economic burden that would otherwise have been the government's lot. There is grave danger, however,

not only for the national economy but also for the environment, if New Zealand were to suddenly rescind its generous immigration policies. In the absence of a national conservation strategy, the urgency of such a strategy, policy or plan cannot be overemphasized, not only for the present population but also in anticipation of any unexpected sudden increase in population.

Among the Pacific groups, immigration has had a major effect on the Samoan population, accounting for about one-third of the total Pacific net migration in the last two decades (Cook, Didham and Khawaja 1999). Remittances from New Zealand during the 1980s were a key contributor and a mainstay of the Samoan economy. They have abated somewhat over recent years. This has been part of the 'dribble down' effect of the neo-liberal economic policies that have dominated the New Zealand economy since the mid-1980s. Invariably, the economic downturn in New Zealand has affected those in the lower socio-economic end of the spectrum where a large numbers of Pacific people are located.

Moreover, the changes to the New Zealand superannuation scheme, which now allows Pacific pensioners to draw on their pensions in Samoa and other islands of the Pacific, may result in some elderly Samoans heading back to the warm climate in their island home. Whether those pensioners who go 'home to roost' will be a threat to the natural environment is probably unlikely in view of the advanced years of most of them. At worst, they may start digging up the ground at the back of the house to plant vegetables and flowers. Some of them are doing that now in Auckland anyway. It is these gardening practices of some Samoan people in their adopted homeland that are the focus of this paper.

This paper examines the gardening practices of a small selection of Samoan migrants who have made Aotearoa their 'adopted' homeland with particular reference to the extent to which gardening practices have been transformed by the migration process. The first section of the paper outlines aspects of village life and the role of gardening in the daily existence of Samoans. The second section establishes how Samoan migrants perceive the values of gardening within the New Zealand environment and highlights how the shift from a tropical to a temperate climate has influenced not only the types of plants grown, but also the uses to which some plants are put. The paper then examines some of the changes and continuities in gardening practices as these are perceived by the participants.

### **The Samoan context: gardening chores, building materials and flowers**

At some point in their lives, most people born and raised in Samoa have direct experience of growing things on the land whether for food or for other purposes. Many, if not all, witness their parents or other family members growing flowers and other plants around the house or cultivating foods and cash crops in the plantations. Those of us who grew up in villages know very well the arduous and wearisome task of going to the plantations to clear the land and then plant taro, *ta'amu*, banana and other crops for consumption.

Then there was the monotonous chore of going to the plantation either to fetch foodstuffs or collect cash crops such as coconut and cocoa. Sometimes, we had to go *i uta* (inland) just to get the *fafie* to fuel the never-ending daily task of cooking the food. Others, mostly mothers and daughters, had the distinction of cultivating the *u'a*, *laufala* and *laupaogo* for mats and *siapo* and so forth. And those of us who are a bit older would have witnessed our mothers lugging on their backs huge bundles of *lau* and taking them home to make the thatch for the *fales*.



Those were some of the practices that I grew up with and were part of the duties Samoan people were accustomed to in the village at least up until the 1960s and perhaps as late as the early 1970s. It was around that time that the *tolo fualau*, the special species of sugarcane that was planted specifically for making *lau*, was gradually phased out, or was, arguably, made redundant because of the increasing use of iron roofing.

First it was the church buildings, then the schools, later the pastors' houses, and later still the village *fales* that were built and covered with roofing iron. In most villages throughout Samoa, it was not uncommon for families who had members who had migrated to New Zealand and other overseas destinations to be the first to build *fale palagi* that had iron roofs. It was usually the *fale* in the village that had to be built first, as soon as the migrants had established themselves in their new overseas environments and were remitting funds home. Samoan parents often reminded their children that the *fale* had to be built because it was the visible investment that everybody could see. At the time, having a *fale palagi* was perceived as a sign of upward mobility and an indication that the family was well off. In most cases, it was the practicality of the longer life of the iron roof relative to the *lau*, as well as the ability of the roofing iron to weather the storms, that made it popular despite the cost.

For mothers and Samoan women though, it would have been a relief not to be gathering cane leaves to re-thatch the *fale* while dressed up in long sleeves in the middle of the afternoon heat in order to avoid the dreaded scratching and itching from the sugar cane. And later in the day in the cool of the late afternoon, having the burden of carrying the cumbersome bundles home where the leaves were then stitched together to make *lau* for the roof. This was certainly a time-consuming and laborious task. These days, women in the villages still weave mats and do other household chores around the homes. But they no longer have to lug the cumbersome bundles of *lau* to thatch the *fales*. In rare cases where *fales* still require *lau*, the *niuolotuma* leaves have become the more practical option for making *lau*.

There were also other gendered chores around the house, including the weaving of mats, looking after the children and elderly people in the household, as well as tending the flower garden to beautify the home. Flowers have always had a special place in the Samoan environment and culture. Flowers such as *puataunofo*, *pua*, *aute* and *rosa* have been romanticised in Samoan popular music. The *rosa* especially, as Ruta Fiti-Sinclair rightly points out in her paper in this volume, is a metaphor for beauty in women. Some Samoan lyrics and love songs affectionately describe and compare one's love for a woman to that for the *rosa*. Another song praises the '*aute* Samoa as beautiful to watch and for its medicinal value. This paper however, does not dwell on flower gardens but explores other domestic gardens and practices of Samoans who live in Auckland.

Whilst conducting the research for this paper, it was clear from participants' comments that most Samoans who live in Auckland still perceive the garden as an integral part of being Samoan. Some of the participants viewed the garden as a means of interacting with their natural environment. Others perceived the garden as a form of cultural expression and a "physical representation that reflects everything about one self". Another informant saw the garden as an essential means of staying in touch with one's genealogy through the cultivation of plants that have medicinal values.

A couple of participants, however, believed gardening in New Zealand did not really mean too much to them because of the economic cost of acquiring planting materials and the investment of

time and effort to tend a garden. From these participants' perspectives, it is not a viable option to put down a garden on the land of their rental properties because, if they were to change houses, the garden would then be a 'waste of time and money' given that it could not physically be relocated.

### **The New Zealand context**

At the Pacific Vision Conference titled 'Navigating the Currents of the New Millennium' held in Auckland in July 1999, Len Cook, then the New Zealand Government Statistician, gave a demographic background which outlined the contemporary situation of Pacific people in New Zealand. The following paragraph from Cook's address provides a snapshot of the demographic 'lot' of Pacific people in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Demographically, Pacific people in New Zealand are characterised by high fertility, rapid miscegenation, a high population growth rate and a youthful population, generally characteristics of developing nations. Their current age structure – a legacy of past trends in fertility, mortality and migration – has a strong in-built momentum for further growth in the new century. Despite inevitable population ageing and the likely drop in fertility, their age structure, even half a century on, will remain more youthful than the current New Zealand structure, and this could have direct implications for the labour market dynamics and New Zealand society as a whole (Cook, Didham and Khawaja 1999).

In 1996 around two-thirds of the total Pacific population in New Zealand lived in the Auckland region (compared with less than 30 per cent of New Zealand's total population). Table 1 below shows that just under 66 per cent of the Samoan population in New Zealand were residing in the Auckland region in 1996.

**Table 1 Pacific population in New Zealand by ethnicity and geographic distribution**

Ethnicity	Total population	Auckland region (%)	Rest of North Island (%)	South Island (%)
Samoan	101,754	65.8	27.2	7.0
Cook Islands	47,019	57.3	36.3	6.3
Tongan	31,389	79.2	16.4	4.4
Niuean	18,474	78.6	16.9	4.5
Fijian	7,895	22.8	73.9	3.2
Tokelauan	4,917	59.5	32.2	8.3
Total Pacific	202,233	65.2	28.4	6.4
NZ Maori	523,374	24.2	63.4	12.4
Total New Zealand	3,618,306	29.5	45.6	24.9

Source: Adapted from Statistics New Zealand *Demographic Trends*, 1996 Census.

As Auckland City continued to grow through the 1990s, Pacific peoples, including two-thirds of the Samoan diasporic community, experienced severe socio-economic difficulties (Macpherson 2001). One could pose the question whether Samoans, who have made their homes in this expanding 'metropolis' over the years, may see a return to the island homeland as a feasible

lifestyle choice. The portability of the New Zealand pension alluded to earlier for instance, could make such an option an attractive prospect.

Sadly, Samoans along with other Pacific Islanders still find themselves at the bottom of New Zealand's economic ladder. They are over-represented in unemployment, poor housing, poor health status, poor education ... the list goes on and on. Yet there is no denying the fact that Pacific Island people in New Zealand, over half of whom are Samoans, "... will increasingly influence the demographic, cultural, social and economic status of New Zealand in the new millennium as the [total] population grows and ages" (Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs 1999). In the words of an article in *The Dominion* 20 July 1999: "The face New Zealand presents to the world next millennium will be a Pacific face. New Zealand's Pacific population was already having a pronounced impact on the sporting scene, and the next area of growth will be in the arts".

As the Samoan population in New Zealand ages, the host country's economic and social policies are changing to inadvertently accommodate and provide avenues which enable Samoan elderly people to be enticed to return to their homeland. However, those that choose to do so may find that they may need to revert back to the gardening practices of the tropics rather than hold onto the gardening practices that they have adopted over the years to suit the New Zealand temperate climate.

Samoans have had to adapt their gardening practices in New Zealand to accommodate a number of fundamentally different circumstances. For example, the limited amount of land available for gardening in Auckland's small suburban residential sections has reduced both the size and the types of gardens Samoan people can cultivate. Another fundamental change is associated with the temperate environment that has largely determined the plant species that can be grown. Some tropical flowers, such as the hibiscus, do grow in New Zealand, but the range and variety of such flowers is quite different from those found in the islands.

In turn, this has affected the ways Samoans have made use of flowers for beautification purposes in the New Zealand environment. For example, artificial flowers are commonly used to decorate their homes and their places of worship. In Samoa in the past, countless frangipani, *aute*, *moso'oi* and other flowers were strung into *faasolo* or stuck together with a *tuaniu* and organised into bouquets to decorate the church or schools. In New Zealand, where such flowers are not so plentiful, a common adaptation of the style of decoration has been to utilise plastic and synthetic flowers instead. Likewise, the use of other types of flowers available in New Zealand from season to season has dictated the types of flowers used for decorating Samoan halls and churches.

At a large birthday party I attended in 2000 at a Samoan church community hall, only a couple of large bouquets of flowers were strategically placed on the stage. Balloons were strung and hung across the large hall. And countless *ula lole* ('lolly lei') were offered to the guests. A far cry from the traditional tropical flower decorations that would have adorned the place had it been a party held in Samoa! There the *ula moso'oi*, *laumaile*, *pua* and *teuila* would have been the norm at such occasions.

On Mothers' and Fathers' Day at our church the hall is normally decorated lavishly using a variety of fresh and plastic flowers. Balloons are strung out and bamboo branches would provide the core of the individual bouquets that would be placed intermittently throughout the hall. The bamboo branches would be adorned with fresh flowers. At the start of the service mothers and/or fathers would be provided with flowers pinned on their white blazers. All mothers and/or fathers

would be garlanded with *ula lolo* at the end of the service. It is a lavish occasion — a modern version of a traditional concept that has been promoted in New Zealand by some Samoan church groups.

Of central importance is the cultural element of beautifying the church or place of worship with flowers that has become part of Samoan values and cultural practice. And while the practices in the usage of plants and flowers have been adapted for practical reasons, they also highlight the fact that some Samoans have continued to emphasise the use of flowers and other plants as an important element of their cultural identity.

The constraints of climate and strict official restrictions on the importation of plant materials have not stopped some Samoan gardeners in Auckland from acquiring planting material from Samoa, including plants with medicinal values from the homeland. How they end up with them in New Zealand is not a concern of this paper. The practice nevertheless, highlights the extent to which some Samoan people will go to acquire things that they perceive to be valuable and desirable for their gardens. Furthermore, such practices underscore the importance, at least for some Samoan migrants, of plants with medicinal values in their gardens in their new and adopted environment.

### **Samoan gardens in New Zealand**

The gardens that are described in this section are not a random sample of Samoan gardens in Auckland. My respondents were selected from my own church community and my friends and acquaintances. This is very much a pilot study that was designed to provide information on the gardening practices of some Samoans in Auckland. A more substantive study is planned to follow up some of the ideas emerging from this research.

Sixteen households were visited, ten in Glen Innes (East Auckland), three in Glen Eden and Avondale (West Auckland), two in Glenfield on the North Shore, and one in Mount Eden (Central Auckland). The ten in Glen Innes were all from the same Church congregation. Nearly all of the people interviewed were in their forties and fifties. One unemployed woman in Glen Innes was in her mid-thirties.

It is worth noting here that there was a significant gender imbalance in the Samoan participants in this research who actually had any involvement at all with the gardens. Women were responsible for the development and maintenance of gardens in thirteen of the sixteen households visited. Men had an active role or involvement in only three of the gardens. One was an elderly retiree who with his wife cultivates their small vegetable garden but only when the weather is warm. He also prunes and ‘cuts back’ the trees at his daughter’s garden. The other two are unemployed men one of whom in his early thirties who does the garden with his wife. The other is a fifty-three year old man who plants and weeds a taro and *ta’amu* patch.

I will now describe briefly the gardens in the four parts of Auckland where the field research was conducted before looking more closely at continuities and changes in gardening practices.

#### *East Auckland*

Eight of the ten families from a Samoan church group in the suburb of Glen Innes had gardens of sorts. Two households had ‘no gardens’ although a row of flowers on both sides of the driveway

of one house was not perceived to be a garden when the husband was earlier asked if they had a garden. A handful of pot plants was scattered outside the front steps of the other house that had no garden.

Of the eight households that had gardens, five were ‘mixed’ in the sense that they included fruit trees and plants traditionally grown in the islands. For instance, taro and banana were grown in six of the gardens alongside hibiscus flowers and other flower species. The preference amongst most of the gardeners spoken to was to plant flowers such as hibiscus, frangipani and *pua fuatausaga* in their gardens. Judging from some of the comments, this is a deliberate attempt to relate to the types of flowers they identify with from the days when they were growing up in Samoa. There is also a sense of nostalgia and in the words of one of the gardeners, “an attempt to stay in touch with the memories of home through planting tropical flowers”.

One family had a few taro and *ta’amu niukini* growing at the back of the section. The man who was cultivating *ta’amu niukini* in his garden had been living in New Zealand for twelve years and said that at first he did not expect the locally grown *ta’amu* to be fit for consumption. When his *ta’amu* started to grow big and looked good enough to try cooking them, he was pleasantly surprised one day when he prepared an *umu* and cooked the *ta’amu* to find that they were really good. The taste was good and there was not much difference from those that are sent from Samoa.

Only one garden had all the above tropical plants as well as the *fa’i pata* growing, literally covering the small section. Additionally, this garden has four plants that possess traditional Samoan medicinal values. This gardener had strong views about the practice of growing plants with traditional medicinal values, and whether such plants should be able to be grown in New Zealand. She could not accept that Samoans had difficulty accessing plants with traditional medicinal values in New Zealand. She has continued to plant the *tolo uli*, the *ti Samoa*, *togo* and *moegalo*, which she says will be useful not only for her own family but for other members of the Samoan community as well.

Parents, according to this gardener, have to set the example for the children. Parents and the older generations should ensure that the younger ones have the opportunity to observe and witness inheritable elements of Samoan culture infused in the practices of the older Samoan generations. She also believes that some of the illnesses that afflict some Samoan people could only be treated with Samoan medicine. Hence the emphasis on growing traditional plants that possess medicinal values.

### *West Auckland*

Three households were visited in West Auckland. One in Glen Eden had what I assumed was a garden that consisted of an apple tree, a plum tree and a peach tree. The Samoan owner, who is married to a *palagi*, had no hesitation in advising me that she had a garden. On arrival at her residence, I walked round to the back of the section in search of this garden given that there was nothing that seemed to equate to a garden in front of the house.

On closer examination of her property however, it was noted that in one corner outside the front door of the house there was a confined area where four small pot plants grow. Around the pot plants were spread various figurines of clay animals, river stones and a piece of chestnut wood. The affirmative response to the earlier question about gardening was actually with regards to this little ‘imaginary’ garden, not the fruit trees out the back. Because her busy lifestyle did not

permit time for a regular garden, this respondent had attempted to create a sense of Samoan identity and affinity in this ‘imaginary’ garden that is “a reminder of me as a person that encompasses values as a Samoan woman”. I return to this garden later in the paper.

The second garden is in the suburb of Glen Eden and has a mix of taro, egg plants, tomatoes and some flowers. The couple, who are in their late-thirties, are both unemployed and presumably have plenty of time to develop their garden to supplement their modest family income. Apart from the taro plants that were growing in the back of the section, the flowers and vegetables around the side of the house did not look very healthy. Apparently, workers who had been instructed by the landlord to clean the outside of the house had used chemicals which, according to the wife, had affected the garden.

The third garden is in the suburb of Avondale. It has three banana trees and a newly planted crop of Maori potatoes. The owner of the Avondale garden is a social worker for a government-funded family support programme that provides financial assistance to struggling families with young children. Part of the social worker’s strategy to promote nutritional diets involves encouraging parents to make use of the land to grow their own vegetables.

The social worker, who is originally from Manono, insists she is trying to promote the concept of *asiasiga*, which is common among women’s committees in Samoa, among her clients in West Auckland. She says the concept of encouraging her clients, most of whom are unemployed, to plant vegetables to supplement their low incomes has not really taken off in Auckland. In the context of gardening, the concept of the *asiasiga* involves people in groups visiting other people’s gardens and observing how they approach gardening as a hobby, and how they benefit economically and nutritionally from planting and cultivating their own vegetables.

According to the social worker, the *asiasiga* concept may need some strategic planning and subtle approaches to convince people to change.

People are so used to living off the [welfare] benefit that they just don’t see gardening as a viable and worthwhile undertaking. They are living off the sweat of other people and the children witness these kinds of lifestyles. Sadly, a couple may be both unemployed and yet are not prepared to spend a little bit of money to buy the vegetable seeds and work the land. They no longer have values, they have no pride. The whole time is taken up just watching television. That’s why I am trying to promote the *asiasiga* concept so that people could observe and witness what other people are doing to try and improve their lives (Makalika Edwards, personal comment, May 2000).

Obviously, the social worker is determined to encourage and motivate her clients to plant and cultivate vegetable gardens to supplement their relatively low incomes. This is often easier said than done, especially in an environment where several factors may contribute to people’s reluctance to grow gardens. For example, some of the social worker’s clients are sole parents with young children that need constant attention and may not necessarily have time to dig a garden. Others live in rental properties from which they could be evicted or removed for any number of reasons and may not feel secure enough to invest their meager resources and time in a garden. As some of the church men observed, if they spent money on planting material and other things and were later evicted from the property, then they would have lost money.

### *North Shore*

A retired Samoan couple who live in the suburb of Glenfield on the North Shore are keen gardeners who enjoy working in the outdoors, but only when the weather is fine and warm. During the time when the children were young and they were living in a larger home, their section was planted with all kinds of plants and trees. They had banana trees that produced large bunches and occasionally they were able to give banana bunches from their garden to the pastor of their church.

Now in their seventies, their new section is small but they still manage to 'jam-pack' a variety of vegetables into their little garden. Not far from their new unit is the house of one of their daughters that has a large section. The daughter's garden provides the space for the retired couple to do the outdoor things they cannot do at their own little section. Whilst this couple still enjoy planting vegetables in their small section, they both find it a struggle to work outdoors when the weather starts to get cold. So the extent of their outdoor gardening these days is during the warm summer months.

### *Central Auckland*

A garden in the suburb of Mt Eden in Central Auckland has a mixture of mature fruit trees such as avocados, oranges, mandarins and macadamia nuts. The front of the house is literally covered with flowers including hibiscus plants as well as some fruit trees. The vegetable garden and fruit trees take up the rest of the back part of the large section. One side of the concrete driveway is lined with potted flower plants, macadamia seedlings and a Samoan mango seedling. This garden has been well looked-after although the seventy-one year old grandmother, who arrived in Auckland from Samoa in 1952, explained her garden had been neglected whilst she and her husband were doing missionary work in Wellington over the last several years.

The gardener insisted her love of plants and her gardening enthusiasm originated from and was nurtured whilst she was growing up as a young woman in Samoa. She had enjoyed growing the flower gardens in Samoa to decorate and beautify the family homes, first in Savai'i, and then in Apia where her mother later moved the family to live. There is nothing this gardener likes better than to just 'look at the plants'. She explained how she would rotate some of the plants from one area of the garden to another. This involves digging up some of the trees and replanting them in different parts of the garden. It is part of her strategy to ensure all the plants get the chance to grow well. She said when some of the trees grow too big they invariably shade other smaller plants. That is when she would rotate the trees by digging them up and replanting them elsewhere in the garden. Alternatively, she would shift some of the smaller plants to other areas of the garden where they may not be so shaded.

This 'mixed' garden at Mt Eden has mature trees both on the family section and along the boundaries with adjoining sections, an indication that this is an older residential neighbourhood in Auckland's suburbia. The gardener's own practices regarding the rotation of plants and trees to provide space and the best chance for individual plants and trees to grow has been acquired over the years that she had spent in the garden. The multitude of flowers, some of which are indigenous to Samoa, is an indication of the values that she places on Samoan flowers. The many species of roses and various other plants that grow in the garden have been bought from the flower and garden shops over the years. Lately, she has been potting seedlings of flowers and plants and may look at selling them off because she has run out of room to grow them all.

## Continuities and changes in Samoan gardening practices and perceptions

In terms of continuities in Samoan gardening practice, it seems that the Mt Eden gardener perceives her garden as a beautification project that had been nurtured in Samoa and has continued to motivate her after nearly fifty years of living in Auckland. She has continued to plant flowers such as the hibiscus, frangipani and the *pua fuatausaga* in her garden because she identifies with them as Samoan flowers. The same thinking process is behind the reason for potting the mango *Samoa* seedling that she hopes to transplant when it is big enough. Another small mango seedling has been planted and is growing on the side of the road alongside some macadamia seedlings.

The perception of one of the gardeners in the suburb of Glen Innes is that growing plants with Samoan medicinal values is necessary in order to provide a supply of those plants if and when people in the community need them. The following phrase is worth examining further: “*E toto mo le manuia lautele o le atunuu*” (They are planted for the general benefit of the people.) This implies that the gardener is mindful of the needs of other Samoan people who may not have access to the traditional medicinal plants grown in her garden. She cited the example of a Samoan man who was very sick and needed traditional *fofo*. She shyly explained that the man’s family had heard about her garden so they were able to get all the traditional medicinal supply of *fofo* from her garden.

This perception that a garden should supply traditional Samoan medicinal plants provides another Samoan perspective. This is contrary to the views of some participants who perceive the garden as a home beautification agent. Whilst this gardener admits she works the garden regularly, regardless of whether it is hot or cold, it is obvious from her excitement talking about her garden that she derives much pleasure and a sense of a Samoan identity from cultivating plants that have Samoan traditional medicinal values. The elderly widow said she likes to plant tropical plants if and whenever she can. This example lends support to Macpherson and Macpherson’s (1990: 6) suggestion that “what Samoans believe, and what they do, about illness is defined by a paradigm which, when viewed in its own terms, has a coherent logic”.

It follows therefore, that the concept of well being is concomitant with some Samoan participant’s worldviews and perception of the environment as part of their cultural and social upbringing (Lima 1999). The emphasis and profound impact of traditional medicinal values on one particular informant’s gardening practice reflects the values she places on health and well being. Her desire to *faagaoioi le tino* (to be physically active and constantly moving around), coupled with a need to be outside of the house rather than inside, may also reflect a sense of continuity of cultural values and practices she was brought up with in Samoa. As Macpherson and Macpherson (1990: 19) observe:

Although culture cannot control us completely, from the time we internalise elements of culture it will shape our lives in important certain fundamental premises of culture, some of these become so central to our understanding of our world that they are taken for granted. ... Culture then, constitutes a resource which we create and on which we draw, consciously and unconsciously, to comprehend our social and physical environments and our place in them.



### *Changes to practice and perception*

Whilst there have been continuities in Samoan people's perceptions and gardening practices since they arrived in Aotearoa/New Zealand, there have also been changes. The perceptions of some of the participants whose gardening interests have been nurtured and developed whilst growing up in Samoa have not changed, even though, for some, their actual practices in terms of the types of flowers and plants they grow in their gardens have. Invariably, the temperate climate of New Zealand necessitates several changes in garden content and gardening practice. There are also the social conditions in terms of economic and socio-cultural values that contribute to the changes to Samoans' practices and perceptions.

There is the example of a Samoan project supervisor whose interest in gardening has not waned after thirty years of living in New Zealand. Her lifestyle and the amount of time spent at work means she does not have the opportunity to have a 'normal' garden. Her 'mini' garden is an innovative adaptation that reflects the flair for creativity and how some Samoan people deal with the natural environment wherever they may be.

I am still very interested in gardening because I love the natural environment. This goes back to my own upbringing as a young Samoan woman and the roles and responsibilities of individuals in the Samoan family. It was part and parcel of growing up in Apia. And doing the garden wasn't just for beautification it was part of the mother's role in the family to grow the flowers while the father grew the vegetables (Mary Watts, personal comments, May 2000).

Because of the participant's work commitments and busy lifestyle, she is unable to grow a normal garden. She has, however, put aside a small area next to her front door which she has turned into a 'mini garden' that comprises four small carefully selected pot plants; two yucca, a palm and a jade plant (the jade is also called a dollar plant). The jade plant was bought in an 'ato'ato filled with pieces of greenstones and pebbles. The 'mini' garden is covered with *ma'ama'a*, a piece of chestnut wood and clay animals.

I am a very busy person so having this [mini] garden brings me enjoyment and personal satisfaction every time I walk past it when I leave and when I return home everyday. It reminds me of who I am and where I come from. It gives me enormous spiritual satisfaction in terms of how we utilise the natural environment and resources. This garden encompasses personal values and is a reminder to me as a person, and myself as a Samoan woman. It nurtures and enriches my spirit and in a deeper sense it reminds me to appreciate nature (Mary Watts, personal comments, May 2000).

Later, when she has a 'bit of money' the informant says she will add a little fountain and put a pond into this square-metre garden. Adding the fountain, she suggested, would complete the cycle of her natural environment: the air, the land and water. Her insightful analysis of the 'mini garden' indicates a deeper understanding and appreciation of the natural environment both in her adopted homeland and in how she perceives and values her Samoan roots.

Whilst some of the informants share similar views in terms of the practicality of gardening as perceived from their own personal understanding of certain issues, there are also differences in how they view the value of gardens and the roles the garden plays in their lives. For example, the perceptions of some informants that the garden is an agent to beautify the home is expanded on by another gardener who emphasises the medicinal values of plants that should be grown in the garden. Another informant insists that the garden is not only to beautify the home, but doing the

garden was also part of the mother's role within the family. This participant further explained that her husband, who is *palagi*, doesn't have any gardening interest at all except for mowing the lawn.

This perceived role of the male as the person to mow the lawn was common among Samoan families who were interviewed for the research. An elderly Samoan doctor whose *palagi* wife tends the flower garden in the front of the house in the suburb of Pt Chevalier and organises the potted trees and other plants throughout the section was quite matter-of-fact about not being involved at all in the garden. His wife later confirmed that the extent of her husband's involvement with the garden was 'mowing the lawn and trimming the hedge'.

The different perceptions of what a garden should be, what should be in a garden, and who should do the gardening are worth exploring further. They reflect the differences in perception and interpretation of gardening practices amongst Samoans who live in Auckland.

### **Some general findings**

It is clear from the discussion so far that there is considerable diversity in Samoan gardening, and perceptions about the value of gardening, in New Zealand. This diversity reflects many things, including the socialisation of Samoans in the village environment and culture of Samoa, and the tenancy conditions of residents in New Zealand. Men often rationalised that spending money to buy planting material and set up a garden was an uneconomic proposition if they found themselves having to move from the rental property. This is not an unusual situation among Samoan people a lot of whom live in rental accommodation. As Cluny Macpherson suggested in discussion, transience made establishing permanent gardens problematical during the early years of Samoan migration to New Zealand (Cluny Macpherson, personal comments, May 2000). Obviously, this was still a problem as perceived by many Samoan people in 2000.

Clearly, there have been transformations in the gardening practices of Samoans in the New Zealand environment as a result of the migration process. Understandably, the fundamental changes and adaptations associated with Samoans' gardening practices mentioned earlier, have been necessitated by the move from a tropical to a temperate environment. Moreover, the cultural and identity aspects of being Samoan in a host environment have become important determinants of what and how Samoan gardeners have shaped their own gardening practices.

The adaptation of gardening practices and the continuity of some aspects of Samoans' perceptions of their cultural values in relation to their health and well-being could well be interpreted as supporting theories about the functional nature of culture and its importance for human survival.

### **Looking ahead**

The paper has examined changes and continuities in the gardening practices of some Samoans who reside in Auckland, the largest Polynesian city in the world. It has outlined some of the gardeners' perceptions about the values of gardens and the environment in terms of their Samoan identities in relation to the types of flowers and plants they grow. Furthermore, it has examined

some of the adaptations in terms of the types of practices Samoans have applied to church and hall decorations in their adopted environment relative to those they practiced in the islands.

A decision for Samoans as to whether they should spend the rest of their lives in New Zealand or to return to their homeland once they retire may be determined by the portability of their New Zealand pensions, and their sense of identity. Clearly, there were no overwhelming suggestions to indicate an inclination for the participants to return. Only two women in their fifties mentioned they would consider returning to Samoa to live when they retire, as long as they were still able to draw their old people's pensions in the islands. One of them said her children were adults now and they would not mind if she wanted to move back to the islands. Her younger sister still lives with her husband and her children at home in the village. That is where she will spend her remaining years though she may still visit her children and grandchildren in New Zealand.

Asked what she would do to pass her time back in Samoa the old lady said she will grow a flower garden around the house just like she is doing in Auckland now. "It is such a relaxing and worthwhile exercise working in the garden and I enjoy the outdoor living more than being stuck inside the house". *O le muagagana e masani ai le atunuu; "E lele le toloa ae ma'au I le vaivai"* – hopefully, whether Samoans choose to return or not, their gardening practices and their association with their natural environment will contribute to the retention of their Samoan identities.

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## Growing Cultures<sup>1</sup>: Subtropical Gardening in New Zealand

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### Introduction

The recent upsurge in subtropical gardening has been nothing short of phenomenal! In warmer northern areas and those unaffected by frost or prolonged low temperatures, subtropicals are literally a blooming industry (Cleverley, in *Let's Go Gardening*, Autumn 2000: 80).

Fijian hibiscus, toughest of the tropical kinds, are often used as hedges in mild climate coastal towns near Auckland and points further north. They flower for months on end in summer and serve as a reminder that, especially in mild areas, we don't have to slavishly follow English gardening styles but can impart a South Pacific feel to our gardens (*New Zealand Gardener* April 1998: 45).

These two quotes from New Zealand gardening magazines reveal that subtropical gardening is currently very popular in the temperate zones of New Zealand. In the first quote readers are told that subtropical plants are a 'blooming industry'. In the second readers are reminded that 'we don't have to slavishly follow gardening styles but can impart a South Pacific feel to our gardens'. The two quotes speak directly to the theme of this paper which is that domestic gardens are not just a form of personal expression but also of social, cultural, national and (post)colonial expression. Gardening in New Zealand has long served an important function in the development of a national sense of self. The editor of a quarterly magazine entitled *Gardening New Zealand* (which is published by the Nursery and Garden Industry Association) writes:

Recently I was involved in producing a brief history of this country's nursery industry. It gave me a wonderful insight into the development of a New Zealand institution which must surely be worthy of 'Kiwi Icon' status. I refer to the garden.

Domestic gardens can be read as texts that raise questions about migration, entanglements of culture, and constructions of diasporic identities. They are a part of a broader 'residential environment'. As Murphy, Friesen and Kearns (1999: 62) note: "The residential environment is the matrix in which migrants and non-migrants engage with the material and social practices of community construction".

Two questions provided the impetus for this paper. First, does the upsurge in contemporary subtropical gardens signal a move away from the 'mother country' towards a greater recognition of New Zealand as part of the South Pacific?<sup>2</sup> To put the question another way, can South Pacific inspired gardens be read as a sign of a broader shift from a colonial to a postcolonial nation in New Zealand? Second, do subtropical gardens reflect and reinforce greater understanding of 'cultural difference' in New Zealand? These are difficult questions and I don't expect to be able to answer them fully in this preliminary paper.

The paper is organised as follows. It begins with a description of the methodological process undertaken to carry out the research. Secondly, I chart a brief history of colonial gardens in New Zealand. There were gardens in Aotearoa long before Europeans arrived. Maori, using seeds and the roots of plants brought with them from Polynesia, had cultivated large areas of land, especially in the warmer North. I focus, however, on the period of colonisation from the mid nineteenth century onwards. Thirdly, I describe current gardening trends in temperate New Zealand. Finally, I offer some preliminary ideas about what this shift in domestic gardening styles might mean in relation to (post)colonial identities and ‘cultural difference’ (see Bhabha 1994) in New Zealand.

## **Methodology**

A variety of methods were used to collect data. I reviewed academic literature on identity politics, cultural difference, and home landscaping in New Zealand. I also collected and reviewed a range of popularist New Zealand literature on gardening, especially gardening magazines such as *New Zealand Gardener* and *House and Garden*. I paid particular attention to magazines and books published in the last five years as these illustrate the recent trend towards the planting of subtropicals. I also analysed newspaper articles on gardening, garden centre/suppliers’ brochures, relevant World Wide Web sites, information on Auckland’s ‘Ellerslie Flower Show’, and television programmes such as ‘Maggie Barry’s Garden Show’ and ‘Ground Force’. I observed domestic gardens and visited garden centres/suppliers and landscapers in the Waikato and Auckland region.

I interviewed nine key informants – three garden centre owners, two garden centre managers, and four home gardeners. The first home gardener had surrounded his two-year-old home with palms and cycads, while the second had planted a combination of native grasses, ferns and palms with some roses scattered throughout. The third participant was in the process of redesigning her existing garden into a more contemporary style. The fourth participant, an elderly woman, was content to retain her garden of mainly annually flowering plants. I carried out all the interviews in person. They lasted between 30-60 minutes, were semi-structured, audio-taped and transcribed in full.

I asked the five garden centre managers/owners whether there had been a shift in consumer tastes over the last five years. I also asked: ‘Do you think people attempt to reflect the interior of their homes in the exterior spaces of their gardens?’ and ‘Have events such as the Ellerslie Flower Show and television programmes such as Maggie Barry’s Garden Show increased the market share of Garden Centres?’ I inquired whether the interviewees thought that New Zealanders were using brighter colours in relation to fences, pots, garden ornaments, and paving. My final and most important question was ‘Do you think New Zealanders now feel a greater connection to South Pacific nations rather than to the United Kingdom in relation to garden plants and practices?’

I asked home gardeners to describe their existing gardens and any plans for future development. I also asked about their likes and dislikes in relation to gardening, what they consider to be recent trends in home landscaping, and whether these trends have affected how they feel about their place – New Zealand – in the world. In analysing the data I was guided by Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman (1994: 10) who identify three components of data analysis — data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing.

## Colonial gardens

New Zealand Pakeha gardeners have long been influenced by gardening trends in Europe and the United Kingdom (see Burnard 1990, Dann 1990, Tipples 1989). Pioneer nurserymen and women grew plants to produce vegetables, fruit, shelter and forest trees.

Many of them came from large estates in Great Britain, bringing their skills, plants and seeds with them and assisting in planting large ornamental gardens all over the country (Wynyard 2000: 3).

One of the most influential trends in home landscaping was cottage gardening. Dann (1990: 2-3) explains that cottage gardens combine “beauty and utility” and often include flowers (such as lavender, jasmine, climbing roses) fruit (such as apples, pears) vegetables (such as leeks, turnips, onions, garlic) and herbs (such as rosemary, thyme, mint). Cottage gardens were ideally suited to the New Zealand quarter acre section.

By 1850, six hundred years after the first cottage gardens were planted in England, cottage gardening was alive and flourishing 19,000 kilometres from its country of origin. After three centuries of changing and growing in Britain, developing better varieties of native plants and evaluating and naturalising new plants brought home by soldiers, sailors, and merchants, the cottage garden itself was exported to each successive British colony established in temperate zones (Dann 1990: 2).<sup>3</sup>

Cottage gardens flourished in New Zealand between the 1830s and 1860s. The first Pakeha settlers brought their cuttings, bulbs and seeds with them but as early as the 1880s commercial nurseries had been set up to cater for the growing demand for healthy plants. In the 1860s nurseries began to issue catalogues of their plants and seeds. From the 1870s onwards hundreds of varieties of fruit and vegetable seeds were available (Dann 1990). Many immigrants who had little interest in gardening ‘at home’ found that they were required to take a greater interest in gardening in New Zealand for reasons of sheer survival.

Thus twelve years after the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi the first publication designed to facilitate gardening in the new colony appeared. This was the ‘Gardening Calendar’ contained in the New Zealand Church Almanac. ... Calendars were obviously important to immigrant gardeners from the northern hemisphere, who had to adjust to ‘upside-down’ sowing and harvesting times (Dann 1990: 25).

In the early twentieth century in New Zealand the cottage tradition of mixing flowers, vegetables, herbs and fruit began to change. Instead of plants cohabiting all around the house, they began to be allocated separate spheres.

Mixed plantings of herbaceous perennials gave way to rows of annuals; roses came down off the walls where they sprawled at ease and stood up straight in rows in front of the house; flowers were banished from the vegetable garden, and the front lawn continued its climb to archetypal significance (Dann 1990: 27-28).

The back of houses came to be devoted to fruit and vegetable production and drying washing, while the front was reserved for flowers, lawns, entrance paths and driveways. This allowed for the movement of vehicles and ostentatious display. The Victorian fashion of ‘carpet bedding’<sup>4</sup>

spread from England to New Zealand in the early twentieth century. These very orderly gardens became markers of the middle class and remained popular until the 1960s and 1970s.

In the 1980s there was a revival of interest in cottage gardens, probably sparked by a revival of interest in herbs (Dann 1990).

By the 1980s nurseries specialising in herbs, cottage plants and perennials were springing up like mushrooms, and cottage gardening in New Zealand had come 180 degrees round the circle, from essential to fashionable (Dann 1990: 33).

The 1990s saw yet another shift in New Zealand gardening practices – a shift that continues today. Home gardeners began to appreciate the value (aesthetic and practical) of planting hardy and evergreen natives. The demand for plants often associated with cottage gardens, for example, roses, began to drop off. This point was made by some of my key informants. Karen, manager of a large Hamilton garden centre, comments: “We’ve found that roses, they’re not on their way out, but there is less of a demand for them”. Michael, joint-owner of a smaller nursery specialising in roses, also notes this trend: “There’s definitely a move away from roses”.

### **From cottage gardens to tropical splendor**

Native plants such as hebes, flaxes, cabbage trees, ferns and carax grasses began to gain in popularity in New Zealand in the 1990s. Karen, the aforementioned manager of a large Hamilton garden centre, explains:

People are going, like during our sale, we’ve found that natives have been a really big mover, foliage plants like cordeline, like cabbage trees, hebes, anything like that. They’ve just been racing out.

She continues: “Palms are also really starting to move around here. Palms are actually quite hardy but they have that tropical look”. In temperate New Zealand the move towards using natives has been accompanied by a move towards using subtropical plants such as palms, cycads, taro, bird of paradise, hibiscus and frangipani.<sup>5</sup> These plants are often associated with South Pacific nations such as Tahiti, Solomon Islands, Cook Islands, New Caledonia, Tonga, Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu. The *Let’s Go Gardening* (2000) magazine carries a special issue on subtropical gardens. The article begins:

Warmer weather patterns and an increased range of plants originating in tropical areas of Pacific basin countries<sup>6</sup> have seen this trend gain momentum. At the same time gardeners are experimenting with various effects, from steamy jungle scenes to minimalist succulent gardens.

Hanly and Walker (1992: 6) define the ‘subtropical garden’ as ‘the exotic garden’. They explain that subtropical gardening is concerned less with climate than with an approach or style. Hanly and Walker (1992) encourage New Zealand gardeners to give up some of the conventions of cool-climate gardening and consider instead “refreshingly different way[s] of creating a garden unfettered by tradition”.<sup>7</sup>

Michael, joint owner of a Waikato nursery, notes this upsurge in subtropical gardening. He comments: “We went to the Hero gardens in Auckland and most of those were tropical and you



had people at the end of it saying ‘Oh no, not another tropical garden’. And that was after only one day of tropical gardens! [laughter]”.<sup>8</sup> Larry, Michael’s co-owner, adds to this:

I think that the subtropical look has come in as a fashion and it’s lower maintenance but like also it only suits certain climates and it’s really hard to create a subtropical look in the Waikato. Climate actually has a really big part to play in what you can plant.

Steve’s Hamilton home garden contains more than twenty varieties of palms and fifteen varieties of cycads. He explains:

I was told that it wasn’t going to be possible [to grow a subtropical garden in Hamilton]. I remember going to [name of garden centre] and I was looking for palms ... and he said ‘you can’t grow palms in New Zealand’ and I said ‘yes you can’ and I started reeling off the names of some cold hardy palms ... I’ve had cottage gardens before but I love palms.

Many gardeners are replacing rambling roses, box hedging, lavender, and daises with native species, palms, cycads and succulents.

This move towards subtropical gardening has been accompanied by an increase in the use of brightly coloured ceramic pots, mosaic paving, rivers stones, punga fences, carvings and edging, lime and shell chip paths, concrete inlaid with paua shell, garden lighting, water features and statues and ornaments made by New Zealand artists. Designers and landscapers are encouraging people, especially those who live in warmer, urban environments such as Auckland, to create a flow between house and garden which fulfills both functional and aesthetic requirements. This fusion of house and garden is closer in function to a Samoan *fale* than to a Victorian villa.

The contemporary gardens I have described above are often the preserve of an urban, white, middle class (especially Aucklanders) but they are continually being created, photographed, and televised for more general and popular consumption and emulation. Most New Zealanders do not own such gardens but the ‘taste-makers’ in society have attempted to ensure that these gardens now inhabit a popular national imaginary.

## Postcolonial nationhood

In this section I turn to the research questions posed at the outset. The first was: ‘Does the upsurge in contemporary subtropical gardens signal a move away from the ‘mother country’ towards a greater recognition of New Zealand as part of the South Pacific?’ I think this trend in gardening does signal a move away from “slavishly follow[ing] English gardening styles” (*New Zealand Gardener* 1998) but not in any straight forward or simplistic way. Domestic gardening points to the active and complex construction of hybrid post colonial identities. Participants were divided as to how they positioned themselves in relation to the United Kingdom and the Pacific. Peter, owner of a chain of four North Island garden centres, thought that the shift from cottage to subtropical gardens is less about people’s identities and more about people’s lack of time and desire for evergreen plants. He says:

I think that there has been a shift in identity but that is quite a secondary issue. It is driven mainly by the time that people have to put into their gardens and the fact that a lot of the European trees are deciduous or seasonal and that doesn’t suit us to have them in the garden.

Dean, manager of a Hamilton garden centre, points out that the knowledge about cottage gardening is not being passed on in families. This, coupled with people's busy lifestyles, has led to a shift in gardening trends.

People who came from the UK had that perception of the cottage garden, that sort of thing, but because their children aren't that interested that stuff is not being passed on, they are not tied to it. And what reinforces that is that people would rather be off at the lake or doing something and they can't be bothered trimming their lavenders or weeding their garden.

Karen, manager of a large Hamilton garden centre, was equivocal about whether the current move towards subtropical gardens was reflecting and reinforcing a shift in identity for New Zealanders. She explained:

Yes and no. I think people like things that are a bit different, like the Pacific Islands have plants that are really exotic and that kind of thing but I also think that 'Kiwis' are English orientated because they like structure, I don't know, they like gardens that are well formed.

Charles, a home gardener aged in his early 40s, also points to the mix of colonial ('old world') and postcolonial ('new world') influences in gardening in New Zealand. When I asked him to describe the style of his garden he replied:

The word fusion springs to mind, although I think it is a little grand as a title but the idea is to mix the natives, particularly ferns, tree ferns, flaxes, cabbage trees with roses. I like the contrast, particularly of tree ferns with roses. And ponga fences, that brown, damp look with a splash of colour of the roses, the juxtaposition of the English, Euro, well roses aren't English of course, they're Chinese, that old world plant with new world plants.

Charles continues to explain that he feels:

... a shared cultural heritage from the UK and from NZ and the Pacific and I feel my identity is tied in to both things and I like the way the garden reflects that. That does resonate. That does have importance for me.

Immigrants have influenced gardening practices in New Zealand but gardening practices have also been influenced by New Zealanders who leave the country on a short term basis, for example, to go on holiday (see Lidgard (1994) on return migration) and return with new knowledges. Steve comments: "You go on holidays overseas and see all these palms and lush foliage and splashes of colour in there as well and it looks really nice. I've been influenced by travelling in Indonesia and Queensland". Charles says: "I was fascinated by the vegetation in Fiji ... that influenced what I did in my own garden". Anna, who was redesigning her garden, reiterates this point:

I don't think it is so much that type of influence [of immigrants coming into New Zealand], it is more us looking outward and seeing what is outside of us. Having spent four months living in Japan I came to appreciate the gardens there and it just sort of appealed to me. It was after being in Japan and experiencing their spring with their

cherry blossoms I sort of thought 'that is just beautiful' ... It is me looking out rather than them coming in, pushing these ideas on us.

After spending time in Japan Anna developed a section of her Hamilton garden into a Japanese inspired area. She was not the only participant to comment on Asian inspired gardens in New Zealand. In discussing the future direction of gardening trends in New Zealand Dean comments: "Asian Fen Shui or whatever it is called. That is quite a big thing now". Peter replied: "We need to know more about that ... it's not only Asians who are in to it". When I asked Larry and Michael whether they thought that there was a trend towards Asian inspired gardens they were uncertain.

Larry: I think there are certainly individuals who are doing that sort of thing [he is referring to the application of feng shui to the garden] ...

Michael: The only way that individuals are going for the Asian trend is if they are buying a house and wanting to sell it to Asians and they do a lot of things. ...

Larry: But no, there is a basic look.

Michael: It hasn't taken off though has it?

Larry: No, but there is no reason why we can't put more of that look into place because it is quite easy to do. Some of it is really pretty.

Michael: As a matter of fact if you could knit that look together with some other looks, that would be really clever.

Bedford (1996: 351) notes that there was a "rapid expansion of immigration from the Pacific Islands in the second half of the 1980s" (also see Chapman 1985). This immigration collapsed in the early 1990s. Murphy et al. (1999: 52) note that changing immigration policy in the late 1980s "resulted in a 'new migrant' population from East Asia, as well as a continuation of European migration" (also see Bedford 1996). Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that Asian gardening styles are beginning to impact on New Zealand. Some interviewees also noted a move towards 'Mediterranean gardens'. Karen, manager of a Hamilton garden centre, explains:

Mediterranean gardening is another one that is coming in. I think that that is the way a lot of people are going — terracotta pots, bay trees, lavender, olives. Definitely the courtyard look.

A more polyethnic society has evolved in New Zealand and domestic gardens both reflect and reinforce this trend. New Zealand has become a postcolonial nation. This is not to suggest that the nation is free of colonial influence or domination but that home landscapes can be read as representing a richer and more diverse cultural heritage than existed a century ago, or even ten years ago.

The second research question is 'Do subtropical gardens reflect and reinforce a greater understanding of 'cultural difference' in New Zealand?' Bhabha (1994: 4) argues that to understand cultural difference is to understand liminal space, the spaces in-between the designations of identity, "the connective tissues that constructs the difference" between people of different ethnicities and cultures. I don't think that a move from cottage to subtropical gardens in New Zealand has created an "interstitial passage" (Bhabha 1994: 4) that opens up the possibility

of cultural difference “without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 1994: 4). In fact, rather than fostering awareness of cultural difference I think that many Pakeha New Zealanders are fetishising subtropical gardens for their exoticness and in the process South Pacific nations risk becomes reinscribed as white New Zealand’s Other. For example, the back cover of *The subtropical garden*, a New Zealand published book, states:

The subtropical garden is a garden of luxuriant foliage, dramatic form and vibrant colour. Lush in undergrowth, it is spiked above with palm or tree fronds, punctuated by suspended epiphytes, with a backdrop of climbing vines and foreground of blazing bromeliads. In its drier areas it flaunts sword-like plants in bold clumps, thick-fleshed aloes and swollen succulents. It is a dynamic and exciting, year-round garden.

This discourse, which is a typical description of the white fantasy of the South Sea island paradise, acts to both exoticise and sexualise the space of the garden. Words such as luxuriant, flaunts, sword-like, thick fleshed, swollen and exciting often carry sexual connotations. Perhaps the suburban backyards of middle class Pakeha are being reconstructed as untamed ‘Fantasy Islands’ (Woods 1995). Maybe business men and women are coming home from work each day keen to throw off the trappings of ‘civilisation’ and lose themselves in a lush and wild landscape, potent with sexual fantasy and pleasure. Steve explains that he has “probably got too much” in his garden but “that is what happens in the wild. You don’t have palms saying ‘hey, one here and one there’, they just sort of fall and seed and grow ... that is what happens in the wild”. Tim constructs his home garden as the wild Other – a fantasy through which he can relive past holidays. He says: “This garden makes me think back to my holiday in Indonesia or somewhere like that”.

Needless to say, designing, representing and/or planting a subtropical South Pacific inspired garden in urban Auckland does not automatically bring with it an understanding of cultural difference in the same way that preparing, cooking and/or eating curry in the United Kingdom does not necessarily bring about an increased understanding of cultural difference. One only has to think about the ‘lager louts’ who ‘make their weekly pilgrimage at pub-shut time for chicken vindaloos all round’ (Bell and Valentine 1997).<sup>9</sup>

## **Conclusion**

There are many issues that I have not been able to address in this paper. For example, the growing of vegetables, historical and contemporary Maori gardening practices, commercial aspects of gardening, the ways in which gender constructs gardening practices, and public gardens. Instead, I have argued that domestic gardens exemplify the complexity of issues of identity in contemporary Aotearoa/New Zealand. Many urban, middle class Pakeha who live in temperate zones are taking elements of South Pacific environments (and perhaps increasingly Asian and Mediterranean environments), filtering them through their own cultural experiences and building them into a new postcolonial identity.

It is too simplistic to say that the recent shift towards the use of subtropical plants in New Zealand gardens reflects a positive shift in the consciousness of white New Zealand towards understanding cultural difference. Rather, subtropical gardens in New Zealand can be read as Pakeha fetishising and exoticising difference. Ironically, this in itself can be read as a form of neocolonialism. Pakeha need to reflect critically on the complexities involved in the production of the gardens they create. They might, for example, reflect on the implications of class

differences between Pacific families (such as those who reside in the South Auckland suburb of Mangere) and Pakeha New Zealanders (such as those who reside in the wealthy Auckland suburbs of Remuera and Parnell). Home gardens are a useful place to begin thinking about the complexity of hybridised and diasporic identities and cultures. My hope is that this preliminary paper will spark further discussion about continuities and discontinuities that occur across local, national and international boundaries.

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## Endnotes

1. 'Growing Cultures' is the title of an exhibition based on five years of research and documentation by Gerda R. Wekerle, Professor of Environmental Studies at York University, with photographs by Vincenzo Pietropaola. The photographic exhibition opened on 6 May 2000 in the Royal Ontario Museum's Heritage Gallery of Canada's Peoples. It explores the gardening traditions of diverse cultures in Toronto.
2. The term 'South Pacific' refers to a vast and diverse array of countries, people, and cultures. Like the term 'Pacific Islanders' it "masks considerable internal variety" (Macpherson 1999: 51) and is perhaps of limited value in understanding the complexity of the region and the people who live within it.
3. Dann (1990) also makes the point that although New Zealand gardens have been heavily influenced by England's role as a colonising power, Britain itself was conquered and colonised several times which gave rise to specific horticultural and landscape trends.
4. 'Carpet bedding' is the formal and regular arrangement of dwarf foliage plant either by themselves or in combination with (often annual) flowers. This planting arrangement gave the appearance of a carpet-like flatness.
5. It is worth noting that the current importation of gardening styles and plants from the South Pacific to New Zealand is part of a broader trend. Much contemporary interior design in New Zealand reflects an 'Oceanic style'. For example, over the last few years an urban Pakeha middle class has begun to use vibrant colours and tapa cloth designs in their homes (see Jowitt and Shaw (1999) *Pacific island style* and Mallon and Pereira (1997) *Speaking in colour*).
6. The style of subtropical gardening emerging in New Zealand also borrows plants from other regions including American yuccas and agaves, South American bromeliads, and African aloes.
7. Hanly and Walker's (1992) popular book *The subtropical garden* has been reprinted twice – in 1996 and 2000.
8. The 'Heroic Gardens Festival' took place in Auckland in 1997. The proceeds of the event went to Herne Bay House, an Auckland City Mission residential service, offering care for people living with HIV and AIDS (see Hanly's (2000) excellent book entitled *Heroic gardens*).

9. A number of authors such as Arjun Appadurai (1988), Christina Hardyment (1995) and Uma Narayan (1995) have used Indian cuisine in Britain, to explore issues in British and Indian cultural politics.

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## **Power Relations Between Two Different Worlds: Commercialisation of a Non-Domesticated Indigenous Plant**

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### **Introduction**

During the 1960s and early 1970s gardens and gardening played a significant role in my childhood. From morning till dusk my grandparents were out in the garden, planting food crops, maintaining our orchard, flower and food gardens. My grandfather's job was tilling and ploughing the soil and maintaining the orchard. My grandmother, my cousin and I were left to do the lighter work. We planted native trees of totara, rimu, and kauri to mark the passing of people in the community, or to celebrate the birth of a *mokopuna*. A plantation of bluegum and pine trees had been sown years before. The plantation provided firewood for winter months, and had the intent of supplying material to build houses for the children if they decided to come home to live. Weekends were also times where we would walk to the back of our farm and gather wild foods, *puha*, watercress, *pikopiko*, and *kouka*.

These sojourns were also used by my grandparents to transplant wild species such as *kaponga*, *ponga*, *mamaku*, *kawakawa*, *toi*, *ti kouka* or *nikau* from the bush to around the house. Raising chickens, geese, ducks, masquove ducks and turkeys, requesting a lamb and/or piglet from members of our *hapu* provided us with meat. *Hapu* (sub-tribe) and *whanau* (extended family) also played a large part in our gardening lives. Planting and harvesting potatoes and kumara in paddocks not being leased to the Pakeha farmers was a community affair, although the storage of the harvest and the sorting of seed plants for the next year's crop were left to each family. In retrospect, gardens domestic or otherwise not only provided for our physical well-being but also reinforced familial ties with *hapu* ensuring the maintenance of our cultural values.

The notion of 'mine' inherent within individual land ownership was cleverly manipulated to encompass the concept of 'ours' by the simple act of collective planting of potato and kumara. The rituals involved in gathering and planting, sharing of work and sharing the harvest of both domesticated and non-domesticated plants exemplified the interrelationships between the *whanau*, the community and their environments. These same rituals were intrinsic educational tools for the younger generation.

Today Maori contend with a society that maintains and sustains communities landscaped in a discourse of economies. Globalisation, privatisation and exclusionary technologies have all contributed to disrupt balances acquired through long and slow processes of socio-economic, cultural and political development.



## Overview

This paper discusses some aspects of the commercialisation of a non-domesticated indigenous plant using the above mentioned themes to underpin this discussion. Due to the commercial sensitivity of the venture this paper does not name the plant, the *iwi/hapu*, or the government institution involved in this endeavor. It does however reflect on the relationships and the interplay of power between two different worlds, and how they manage to co-exist.

This paper will give a chronological overview of events that occurred between the parties involved drawing selectively on discussions held in confidential minutes from meetings between *hapu* members and the institution. I will also draw on small segments from interviews and information collected from my research to illustrate these themes. The research itself is preliminary due to the small number of interviews completed, and the absence of *hapu* and *iwi* input and debate into this paper.

Research undertaken has involved semi-formal interviews, formal interviews, and literary reviews. Questions in the formal interviews went directly to the significance of the plant to the specific *hapu* and *iwi*, and to Maori in general. Interviewees were also asked how they identified the plant, its growth habits, habitats, harvesting methods, propagation techniques and methods of cooking.

A significant proportion of literary information was acquired from Elsdon Best's writings (for example, see Best 1903, 1925 and 1931). Best was an English ethnographer who wrote about the particular region of study from mid 1800 to the early 1900s. Literary data used pertain specifically to the plant, its ancestors and its descendants. Literary data gathered was applied in the interviews primarily to prompt memories. Interviewees were also asked for an opinion as to how well they thought Best interpreted the information that he had gathered. Minutes from previous meetings between *hapu* members and the institution were also used.

## The beginning

The journey commenced approximately five years ago when a government institution began investigating the commercial potential of propagating a non-domesticated indigenous plant. A student working for the institution later found out about the project and offered her assistance. She returned home and informed an elder relative. After making contact and learning more about the project, the institution and the relative approached one of the tribal organisations that holds trusteeship over the majority of amalgamated land holdings of the tribe. The organisation forms a limited representational body of most *hapu* within the tribal district. The inclusion of a tribal organisation at the outset was a fundamental requirement.

The plant itself is part of the cultural and intellectual makeup of the tribe. The knowledge of its origins, harvesting and propagating techniques has been handed down through the generations and so became a feature, a historical practice of *hapu* and the tribe. Processes of establishing a structure to encourage discussions to take place needed to acknowledge these values and be open to, and inclusive of, as many tribal members as possible. The tribal organisation was not enthusiastic about involving itself at that stage. However they and the relative approached the specific *hapu* whose identity and traditions are intrinsically interwoven with the plant in question. The *hapu* did not want to have any involvement in the commercial operation. At this point the tribal organisation also disengaged itself from the venture.

Still adhering to the open and inclusive practice, the relative then approached another multi-*hapu* organisation whose influence covered a smaller region within the tribal boundaries. General discussions were held in October 1998 between the institution and several members of the *hapu* organisation and others. An outline of the potential of the project was given. Strategies as to how the project could proceed, how best to implement a marketing strategy, the duration of the partnership, cultural perspectives, and protection of the plant were also discussed. It was agreed at this time that the project would be kept low key and as such, media were not to be spoken to unless both parties approved. It was also agreed that a Draft Memorandum of Understanding would be drawn up and the relationship between the two entities clarified. The *hapu* organisation agreed to assist the institution with a working committee made up of members of the *hapu* organisation and others interested (Minutes: Research and commercial opportunities of X as a food crop/health product, Friday 23 October 1998).

At the next meeting held within the *hapu* district the project was explained to all *hapu* members represented on the organisation. A general outline of the Memorandum of Understanding was given. A proposal to set up a workshop to discuss intellectual property was also submitted. Possible research projects on propagation and sensory evaluation were mentioned, as well as discussing avenues to find funding for the project (Summary of Meeting with X *hapu*, 4 March 1999, X Marae). It was pointed out that research undertaken to date had only received minimal government funding and that other work had been undertaken at the expense of the institution. Genetic fingerprinting was also discussed as a marketing tool that would help safe guard the plant's 'unique identity'. An Intellectual Property Agreement would also be drawn up as a separate document to that of the Memorandum of Understanding which had a two year duration from the time of signing at which time there would be a review of the situation. It was also noted that concern was voiced about multinational pharmaceutical companies and how they might take research data. The institution indicated that this would be unlikely without its permission. The Memorandum of Understanding was signed at this stage of the project. Discussions continued in April 1999 with the intermediaries and members of the institution. Issues dealt mainly with the Intellectual Property workshop, how that could proceed and what it would encompass. Different avenues for funding were also discussed. At this stage the intermediaries put forward the names of contact people so that the institution could begin communicating directly with the *hapu*.

The first meeting that I attended, held some time in June-July, ended on a disheartening note for the institution. The institution and intermediaries attended the *hui* (meeting) on the understanding that someone would take them into the field to gather samples. It was not until the conclusion of the first half of the meeting (where other *hapu* business was discussed) that the institution was informed about a communication mix up and as a consequence the field trip had not been organised. It was decided that the field trip would be organised as soon as work and community responsibilities would allow.

In contrast to this, the next meeting that the intermediaries and I attended in August-September 1999 was hopeful. The organisation agreed that the project should still proceed and that research should begin. A contact person and myself organised tentative dates to proceed with the field trip that finally transpired in November. Informal interviews began in mid December 1999 and came to a grinding halt at the end of that month.

## Relationships, responsibilities and *Tikanga*

Tribal *tikanga* (protocols, practices, values) which I have touched on briefly in the previous paragraph has directed the course of this project from its beginnings to the present and is illustrated by the inclusion of the tribal organisation and the multi-*hapu* organisation. *Tikanga* also dictates the manner in which interactions between individuals, communities and organisations occur. The foundation of this structure is the inherent belief in the responsibility and obligations that we hold to the land, to the environment and to our people's past, present and future.

The participation of these tribal/*hapu* organisations are vital: they are the most appropriate mechanism of communication available within the tribe and are ideally inclusive of all members. Dissenters and supporters have an equal right to raise issues, to put forward their arguments, to debate and stimulate discussion. However during the preliminary or semi-formal interviews in December 1999 weaknesses in the project's methodologies were found and had profound impacts on the project.

The forums provided a comfortable and familiar setting for the *hapu* participants but the content material of the *hui* caused some confusion, anxiety, suspicion and resentment from some quarters of the *hapu*. Major issues of intellectual property, cultural property and genetic fingerprinting were all raised in the *hui* held in March 1999. However, a member of the *hapu* who attended the *hui* interpreted the presentation given by the institution as dealing primarily with economic gains of the project. In the participant's opinion not enough time or attention was paid to the more important cultural and social issues raised. An interpretation of the presentation given by the institution was "here was another government institution trying to make a fast buck out of Maori". The participant also felt strongly that not enough time was given to digest or discuss not only the positive but also the negative implications of this venture.

This same participant had also discussed the project with a prominent political figure some time after the meeting and at the end of those discussions the interviewee decided not to participate any further in the project. In contrast to the interviewee's interpretation of events, the representatives of the institute felt that things had gone well, they could not detect any form of dissent.

This leads me to the conclusion that preconceptions, miscommunications, and unfamiliarity by the representatives of the institution with the processes of *hapu*, *hui*, the people and their history on the one hand, and the scope of the proposed project on the other hand led inevitably to misunderstandings. As a consequence of these initial encounters some dissenters did not attend later *hui*. At this point, the absence of those *hapu* members indicates the weakness in the processes and its effectiveness of the entire process is put at risk by the inability to both inform *iwi/hapu* and to be informed by the *iwi/hapu*.

The inclusion of as many tribal members as possible into the venture not only provided maximum exposure for the project but also intrinsically encompassed and further enforced the concept of collective 'ownership' of knowledge. Within the concept of 'ours' (inclusive of tribe) there is also the 'ours' that is exclusive to *hapu*. Each *hapu* has its own customary areas where members are free to harvest food, medicines, weaving materials, carving materials etc. Within those boundaries, *hapu* have authority over the resources (interview May 2000).

Although the processes involved discussion at tribal and *hapu* level, the domestication and commercialisation of the plant and the research that has been completed by members of various *hapu* places the notion of 'ours' within the wider context of the tribe. It is tribal knowledge at *hapu* level that is being collected by the institution and the researcher. The privilege of receiving information that has been handed down from generation to generation is precious and must be recognised. Careful thought must be given to all the issues before disclosing any information (interview May 2000). Knowledge gained is intergenerational and becomes a means to connect our collective past to our future, bringing the notion of continuity, of forever and ever to life. With this acknowledgement of merging past and future comes the responsibility to use the information carefully and for the betterment of the collective.

### **The realities of research and relationships**

The collection of information on a plant frequently used by the tribe seemed an easy task for a first time, young(ish) woman field researcher when I joined the project in August-September 1999. The interview process highlighted the variant and problematic nature of an academically positioned research process and an *iwi/hapu* positioned process. Where an academic approach to research for this venture had the capacity to be objective, the expectation from the interviewees and my own predilection to the research meant that subjectivity was unavoidable.

Relying on minutes and summaries of proceedings from those who supported the project did not reflect the objections that were raised in December 1999, nor could they be expected to when the lines of communication were effectively cut with the absence of dissenters to the project at previous meetings. As another example of miscommunication, the issue of genetic fingerprinting was interpreted as being the first step to genetic engineering by some *hapu* members, and was a topic that the interviewees needed to have clarified. None of the intermediaries could give guarantees that satisfied the *hapu* members whom I initially approached. Instead of modifying our communication processes to allow for further clarification and dialogue between the parties, the directive at that time was to circumvent political issues and to collate only data dealing directly with the growth, propagation and harvest of the plant to accomplish the research and begin the actual propagation of the plant.

The possible negative implications of the project and the way in which problems had been dealt with in this particular instance also showed the different influences of the two worlds. The institution understood and accepted the market driven criteria of the business venture. It would be to the tribe's advantage to commence production of the plant as soon as possible. The time constraints dictated procedures, hence the two-year time frame stated in the Memorandum of Understanding. Interviewees could understand this but they felt that if the project was for the benefit of the tribe more weight should, and could, be given to other issues and ways should be found to accommodate *iwi* concerns. If the project took longer than anticipated then so be it (interview December 1999). Time constraints were defined by market forces and placed under more pressure by the unavailability of elders and other individuals who had given their support to the project.

As mentioned previously, the first field trip to collect plant samples did not eventuate. It was not until the second field trip that it was found that our guide had been training for two weeks prior to when the meeting was arranged. His job also entails frequent travel and as a consequence he could not be contacted. Similarly, the elder who was to contact the guide had been to *tangi* and

meetings on a local and national level, fulfilling his obligations as an elder of his *hapu* and his *iwi*. Finding a time that suited interview participants in the year 2000 was also difficult due to *tangi*, work and family commitments. Once again there was a breakdown in communications through no particular fault of any individual and another barrier was erected.

Interviews ceased until May 2000; at this point I had reconciled the varied expectations of each party. To come to a conclusion it was necessary to define my role in the project and to assess the approach and attitude I had adopted so far. Two things became obvious after some consideration.

Firstly, I had taken my relationships with *tangata whenua* for granted. The relationship had been set in our shared histories as members of the *hapu* and *iwi*. This history led me to assume that the preliminary interviews were only a formality and access to relevant information would be automatic. This assumption led me to two wrong conclusions. One was that my relationship with the institution had no bearing on my research. The other conclusion I arrived at was that I treated interviewees as my relations, not as participants in a research project and as a consequence I had not investigated the project as thoroughly as I would have if they had been total strangers.

Secondly, defining my role and my objectives clarified my responsibilities as a *hapu* member, as an intermediary, and as an academic researcher. I was able to redefine my role by accepting not only responsibility for my actions but also defining my obligations to the participants and to the *hapu* by taking every appropriate precaution to protect their knowledge. It had been necessary to take the time to redefine my position and then act accordingly.

Although *tikanga* guides the direction of the systems developed through the venture, it seems that the paradigms that govern external influences automatically take precedence, and as a consequence, compromises to *tikanga* are presumed necessary. A possible solution suggested by an intermediary to counter the imbalances occurring within the relationship involves a steep learning curve for both institution and organisation. Deficiencies in communication between all parties have created the most barriers, therefore the lines of communication need to be improved. For logistical ease it has been suggested that the institution representatives actively cultivate the relationship with *tangata whenua* by dealing directly with those involved, in this way both gain more exposure to and hopefully more understanding of the differing needs of each other. The reliance on intermediaries to facilitate and interpret communications between parties has the potential to create its own problems but is avoidable.

## Conclusion

The journey embarked on five years ago has not drawn to its conclusion. However, insight into maintaining a workable relationship that can be sustained successfully between two separate worlds has been gained as the journey continues. The need for constructive communication has proved essential, and difficult, but not impossible to attain. The understanding shown by both the institution and *iwi* participants as the research has progressed through each stage, even under immense pressure from time constraints and misunderstandings, has been relatively successful, although not without its problems. As an intermediary pointed out, the tribe has taken only two years to decide to support this project. There is however, still room for improvement.

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