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ARTICLE

From the F-Word to a Samoan Feminism: Cultivating Samoan Feminist Thought

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Abstract
Through the colonial period in Sāmoa, Christian morality was embedded into Samoan culture. This transformed gender relations, introducing a new, well-disciplined figure of the Samoan woman. Because of this shift, we argue for the need to develop Samoan feminist thought, which is as much a development of new thinking as it is a return to and restoration of Samoan feminist thought already in existence within Indigenous Samoan cosmologies. We contextualize this thinking within a coalition of Pacific, Indigenous, Black, and women of color feminist thinkers. As feminist scholars have established, feminism doesn't resonate or work with a simple copy and paste to culture and context. Rather, feminisms are contextual and subjective. It is thus imperative that those from within various contexts continue to broaden understandings and conceptualizations of feminism/s, which work toward demarcating spaces for feminist thought that illuminates multiple, diverse, and intersecting subjectivities and positionalities. As such, the task for us as Samoan women, people, and communities is to develop a feminist space that encompasses and fosters a by-us, for-us, with-us approach that challenges coloniality in Sāmoa and articulates feminist possibilities and futures.

A suli of our moana[i] **[A descendant of our ocean]**
In the words of my feminist mothers Taema and Tilafaigā,
e tatā fafine, 'a e le tatā tane [tattoo the women, not the men]
So I say,
loto tele, we are toa [be strong and courageous, we are strong and courageous]
tama toa, teine toa, a toa [strong men, strong women, strong whole]

I hold, bear and wear our measina [treasure]
e malu ai fafine [to protect and shelter our women]
e malu ai aiga [to protect and shelter our families]
e malu ai le tatou atanu'u [to protect and shelter our country]

I am a sister
I hold my sister and sisters
I am a daughter
I hold my mother and daughter
With me, always

I am a feminist
But as they say,
I am not just a feminist
I am not just a woman
I cannot ever be *just* a woman
I am Samoan
I am Sāmoa
And, my Sāmoa bleeds into my womanhood and woman-ing
bleeds into my sisterhood of women

I stand on legacies
Of Nafanua
Of Salamasina
Of our mothers
to continue the legacies
Of our future

I am a Samoan feminist
I am a suli [descendant] of our moana [ocean]
I am a suli [descendant] of our foremothers

Moeata Keil

1. Introduction

As the opening line of 'A suli of our moana' reads, within the Samoan cosmology, we have feminist mothers. They include Taema and Tilafaigā, the conjoined twins and gods of tatau (tattoo) who swam from Fiji to Sāmoa carrying our revered tatau tools singing, "e tatā fafine, 'a e le tatā tane" (tattoo the women and not the men). There is Nafanua, daughter of Tilafaigā and Saveasi'uelo, ruler of the underworld, who grew from the ground to be the fierce Samoan god of war. There is Queen Salamasina, who achieved the paramount status of Tafa'ifā by holding and uniting the four papā titles that are imbued with the highest social and political status. When we look into these histories of Sāmoa, it is clear that Samoan women had power and status in society. While the Samoan political system as well as systems of power have always been stratified and hierarchically based on status and age, it was balanced in terms of gender. Sāmoa was inherently already feminist (Lopesi 2023), premised on values of reciprocity, relationality, and service. However, today feminism within the Samoan context holds a contentious place. Like Luana Ross (2009) who wrote about feminism being "the f-word" in Native feminist contexts, it holds a similar place within contemporary Samoan contexts. In particular, feminism is often thought of as being something from the West without a place in fa'a Sāmoa or the Samoan way.

As two Samoan women, mothers and feminists, we articulate and reflect on the tensions, contradictions, complexities, and possibilities for cultivating a strand of

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Samoan feminism. We do so by exploring the ways that the gender balance within Samoan society has shifted from the time of Taema, Tilafaigā, Nafanua, and Salamasina to today. Through the colonial period, missionization was incredibly successful in Sāmoa, embedding Christian morality into Samoan culture. This transformed gender relations of all kinds, and introduced a new, well-disciplined figure of the Samoan woman. Because of this shift, we argue for the need to develop Samoan feminist thought, which is as much a development of new thinking as it is a return to and restoration of Samoan feminist thought already in existence within pre-colonial Samoan cosmology. We contextualize this thinking within a coalition of Pacific, Indigenous, Black, and women of color feminist thinkers. We contribute our voices to this chorus of Pacific and Indigenous feminist voices in solidarity with Native, Latinx and Black feminists who have worked vigorously to develop and demarcate an intersectional and decolonial feminist space that brings to the center the voices of women who have existed in the margins of feminist thought, theory, and praxis. We also find the limitations of this feminist thought within the Samoan context, and urge forth the future work of Samoan feminist thought that is both cognizant of and responsive to the complex political and social context and history of Sāmoa.

We write from what Teresia Teaiwa (2001) describes as the edges, namely from Aotearoa New Zealand and the United States. We position ourselves as Samoan women in various sites of diaspora who also work in academia. We welcome the critiques that may come from holding these positions, and hold strong to the fact that we are two voices, who do not stand in for all Samoan women and feminists. Rather we recognize and respond to our duties and responsibilities as navigators and wayfinders to contribute to debates and deepen discussions around the place for feminist thought within Pacific cultures. We hope that this paper will inspire an echo and call to action for Samoan and Indigenous Pacific feminists to continue to carve and map out strands of Samoan and Pacific feminist intersectional thought.

2. The "F" word

There is a resistance to the word feminism within Samoan communities, a sentiment shared across wider Pacific, Indigenous, and women of color contexts. Luana Ross (2009, 46) describes early Native American feminists as a kind of secret society who called feminism "the f-word." Despite her work in the 1980s being well received by reservation communities, who appreciated the opportunity to speak on issues such as gendered violence as experienced in their own communities, feminism as a label carried a particular kind of burden within Native spaces because of its association with whitestream feminism. As Kate Shanley (1984) points out, a part of seeing feminism as the f-word comes from a refusal to be connected to a white women's movement, and the often ignored Native roots of white feminism (Gunn Allen 1986). Then and still today, within many Indigenous and communities of color, feminism is tarred as being a white women's movement.

In recognition and response, intersectional feminists, including Indigenous, Latinx, and Black feminists began to carve out and demarcate a feminist space that captures and articulates how intersecting axes of difference interact to differentially position, produce, and shape women's experiences of marginalization in research and society, more generally. In the context of the United States, Black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins (2022), Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), Audre Lorde (2007), and bell hooks (2000) focus in particular on how race, gender, and capitalism interact to perpetuate racialized systems

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of oppression and marginalization. While others such as Argentinian scholar María Lugones (2007, 2010) emphasized understanding and approaching feminist thought through the lens of decolonization to recognize that in colonial contexts gender relations are filtered through and informed by colonial binary and heteronormative gender relations. Furthermore, Indigenous scholars and activists, such as Kanaky Susanna Ounei (1992), Native Hawaiian Haunani-Kay Trask (1996), and Native American Luana Ross (2009) deepened articulations of feminism through their critique of (ongoing) colonialism and significantly, the centrality of rights to sovereignty and self-determination for Indigenous women, people, and communities. Pacific scholars, such as Cook-Island and Niuean feminist Yvonne Underhill-Sem (2012, 1098), highlight the challenges of "isolating one's gender from the myriad of other self-identified attributes which then somehow require linking up with others who have negotiated through a similar constellation of identities." Collectively, these works spotlight the significance of a nuanced approach to thinking through feminisms and feminist issues beyond simply thinking about "gender" alone. Structurally, as Māori feminist activist Ripeka Evans (1979, 24) argues, "we must look at the destruction of patriarchy in terms of all the other institutions it has created and props up. . . . our attacks as feminists must be diverse—we must attack sexism and racism and capitalism and all that is created by them," including colonialism.

Critiques of whitestream feminism are resounding within existing Pacific feminist scholarship, which points to the limits of white liberal feminism's ability to capture the lived experiences and realities of Pacific women (Ounei-Small 1995a, 1995b; Marsh 1998; George 2010; Naepi 2016; Vercoe and Taumoefolau 2022; Lopesi and Keil, 2024). Present in these critiques are also the long-standing acknowledgment of liberal feminism's emphasis on individual freedom and liberty that often obfuscates different gender experiences across ethnicity and race. This thinking fails to acknowledge that those with multiple, intersecting identities encounter different choices and constraints to their white counterparts. Pacific voices thus add to the cacophony of Black and women of color feminists that have long made these arguments (Gage 1863; Combahee River Collective 1977; Moraga and Anzaldua 1983; Crenshaw 1989). In partnership with other feminist work, Pacific feminist scholarship emerges from the recognition of the marginalization of the voices and experiences of Indigenous women and women of color in historically privileged white liberal feminist theory and research, acknowledging the incommensurability between whitestream feminism and Pacific lived realities.

While we know that feminism has been reworked in many contexts to have liberatory possibilities for communities beyond that which white liberal feminism could offer, feminism still carries the burden of perception as a white women's movement advocating for women's rights, which is often translated as being against men. In this vein, feminism as seen as being anti-male is also influenced by mass media (hooks 2000, 1–2). However, as Luana Ross (2009, 45) argues, in the context of settler colonialism and particularly the decimation of Indigenous people and communities by colonial powers and oppressors, "Native women [are] fiercely protective of Native men." As a result, there can be a sense of fear that speaking out on gendered issues within one's community would be dangerous for Indigenous men. Within the United States, this was also felt within Black communities, where Black women speaking on the specificity of their own experiences in some contexts was interpreted as "a denial of, or threat to" Black male identities (Lorde 2007, 62). Similarly, in the Pacific, Māori activist Donna Awatere (1984) argued that whitestream feminism sought to pit Māori women and men against each other, and simultaneously rejected the sovereignty of Māori or accepted the

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colonial imposition on Māori. Haunani Kay Trask similarly described feminism as a "haole intrusion" impeding her efforts for Hawaiian nationalism, and noting it as an American ideology foreign in native Hawai'i (Trask 1996, 909).

Thus, there is a connection being made that feminism is anti-male and, by extension, anti-culture. Drawing on these same sentiments within her own context, Native American Kate Shanley asks, "Does being a feminist make me less Indian?" (Shanley 1984, 213). This fear of being less Indigenous demonstrates again the emphasis of feminism being interpreted as a synonym for whiteness. This conflation obfuscates two things, first, the ways "patriarchal colonialism has been internalized within indigenous communities" (Hall 2008, 278; see also Hall 2009; Baskin 2020). Meaning that while liberal feminism's usefulness for Indigenous communities and other communities of color is limited, we also need to acknowledge that patriarchy has created "a mythological Native past that mirrored the heteropatriarchal structure of settler colonial society" and thus any moves toward Indigenous sovereignty also require Indigenous feminism (Baldy 2018, 30). And second, that Indigenous feminisms are not a diversity, equity, and inclusion intervention placed onto whitestream feminism, to color it brown (Awatere 1984; Trask 1996; Moreton-Robinson 2000). Or what Audre Lorde (2007, 60) calls feminism in blackface. As Aboriginal scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000, 151) notes "Indigenous women do not want to be white women," rather Indigenous women want to exercise self-determination as Indigenous people, including in the sphere of gender.

The idea that feminism is anti-men and by extension anti-family and anti-culture is evident within Samoan contexts, where coupled with the understanding of feminism that comes from mainstream media, religious institutions have considerable influence, with feminism perceived as dissenting from the cultural and religious disciplining, especially of girls and women, embedded within fa'a Sāmoa (Samoan culture). As Marsh (1998) notes, Christianity, church, and culture continue to play a central role in the lives of Pacific women. Thus, Samoan women are in many ways culturally constrained from engaging with feminist ideologies and discourses—for example, feminist critiques of gender hierarchies that challenge values expressed and interpreted through biblical texts that men are heads of the households or notions of women's equality and egalitarian (non-hierarchical) relationships that challenge the status and position men in the family (Lopesi and Keil 2024). Thus, as Marsh (1998) similarly notes, Samoan women are constrained in their ability to use or deploy feminism or feminist activism to initiate change, because of the challenge it poses to patriarchy. This is further stunted by Pacific women's suspicions, ambivalence, or rejection of feminism because "the term *feminism* has had very definite meanings" (Marsh, 1998, 65) that are oriented toward the experiences of white Western women, which has been used as the baseline for a universal sisterhood. Feminism is thus stained with negative connotations of being an adopted and colonized position or way of thinking about the world, because feminism has been misunderstood as something-to-do-with-the-West, that contradicts contemporary Samoan cultures and customs that are ironically firmly rooted in Anglo-Western Christian religion, as we will discuss in greater depth in forthcoming sections. Being a feminist is, thus, a position that has often been interpreted as anti-culture and anti-religion: a position that is often accused of speaking against tradition and religion by challenging hierarchical patriarchal gendered norms and values propagated through the missionization (and colonization) of Sāmoa. Thus, contradictorily, often times the gendered ideas being culturally protected are colonially imposed cultural ideas that have everything to do with colonized and Anglo-Western ways that have fundamentally

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changed, altered, and contradicted pre-colonized, pre-missionized, and Indigenous understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality in and across Samoan and wider Pacific contexts, a point we discuss in detail in forthcoming sections. In the following section, we establish the social and political context of Sāmoa, relating this discussion to coloniality. Following this, we outline how missionization and colonization altered the position of women in Sāmoa.

3. The Samoan context and coloniality of power and gender

Sāmoa[ii] was a former German, British, and New Zealand colony that gained independence in 1962. Thus, the settler colonial context that much Indigenous, Black, and women of color feminist thought is written from is different from the Samoan colonial context, which proudly boasts its sovereignty by assuming a post-colonial status achieved through post-World War II decolonization. However, as we argue in this section, despite achieving political self-determination, personal self-determination and sovereignty across all genders is fundamentally unstable. Imposed Western patriarchal gender norms and power systems are still present within Samoan contexts. As such, Western gender binaries and hierarchies are entangled within contemporary Samoan culture or faʻa Sāmoa in complex ways. This entanglement demonstrates the need for the development of Samoan feminist thought that is unique to Samoan contexts while also holding space for feminist coalitions.

To establish greater context, Sāmoa gained independence following World War II through the United Nations formation and protection of the right to self-determination, as promised in Chapter 1, Article 1, of the United Nations Charter. Sāmoa was among the first to find self-determination through this process, a process that was accelerated by the mounting pressure from the local Mau Movement, a Samoan resistance movement against the colonial rule of New Zealand and all foreign powers that advocated for a "Sāmoa mo Sāmoa" or Sāmoa for Sāmoa and Sāmoa by Sāmoa. This sentiment recognized that Samoan sovereignty should not reflect the values of external and Western protocols and practices, but the Indigenous value systems of fa'a Sāmoa. However, to achieve self-determination that would be recognized by the United Nations, Sāmoa adopted one of the limited models of existing Western governance systems and structures. Thus, the national Samoan government was formed based on the Westminster model and according to democratic processes, which sat alongside Indigenous chiefly forms of governance or the faʻamatai system. The reason why this is so important in this context is that formal decolonial attempts at the time did not allow "room for radically different models of political, social or economic organization, and [offered] little possibility of opting out of the system altogether, the only real 'choice' for island societies was to join the 'family of nations' on already established terms" (Lopesi 2018, 47–48), thereby establishing post-coloniality and hampering attempts to achieve genuine decoloniality. We know that Western governance systems imposed on Indigenous contexts are ones that not only establish but also uphold white supremacy and heteropatriarchal ideologies and institutions (Lugones 2007; Pihama 2019). So, in this context, formal independence operates as a way to embed coloniality within newly Independent states to continue colonial legacies within a post-colonial world. Such a system was bolstered by the fact that, as seen across a myriad of global Indigenous contexts, it afforded Indigenous men new avenues of power, which, as Cavino (2019, 100) notes in the Māori context, seduced our tane or Indigenous men (see also Evans 1981). So while the independent status of Sāmoa today might support the belittlement of

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a Samoan feminism that critiques processes of colonization and coloniality as being unnecessary, we argue that coloniality (Quijano and Ennis 2000; Quijano 2007; Mignolo 2007; Lugones 2007) still exists in Sāmoa, especially in relation to gender. Contextualizing coloniality, to which we turn to next, is key to considerations of Samoan feminism as an avenue to decoloniality.

Busting the myth that the formal United Nations-sanctioned processes of decolonization eradicated colonial ideologies, Puerto Rican sociologist Ramone Grosfoguel (2011, 14) argues that:

> One of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world. This led to the myth of a "postcolonial" world. . . . We continue to live under the same "colonial power matrix." With juridical-political decolonization we moved from a period of "global colonialism" to the current period of "global coloniality".

In a similar vein, Quijano (2000, 2007) and Mignolo (2007) use coloniality to refer to the way colonial structures often prevail within former colonial societies, even after they become independent states. Relating these arguments to the Samoan context, the era of political decolonization is thus an unfinished decolonial project. In particular, it is a decolonial project that has given way to a new era of coloniality, where Indigenous communities are no longer overtly being held captive by Western powers and peoples, but covertly by not disconnecting from or disestablishing institutions and systems that were established by imperial colonial powers. In other words, coloniality can be understood as the inheritance Western powers left in their ex-colonies; an invisible power structure that continues to sustain colonial hierarchies and relations of domination and exploitation. In that sense, colonization has been so successful that communities now do the colonizing themselves. Colonization should not be viewed as an event in history, a historical period, but rather as a structure and a process that is still happening today (Wolfe 2006). It is pervasive and embedded.

Building on Quijano's "coloniality of power" and Black feminist approaches to intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) and understandings of interlocking systems of oppression (hooks 2000), Argentinian feminist decolonial scholar María Lugones (2007) developed the coloniality of gender to describe another part of the matrix of power. For Lugones, an integral part of the colonial project involved establishing patriarchal gender relations to strip women of their status, autonomy, and power. This imposed colonial gender order which designated binary, heteronormative understandings of gender, differing from many Indigenous conceptions of gender. Lugones encourages a consideration of the historical moment in which "gender" as a specific colonial tool and institution was imposed on Indigenous people and societies to become a form of subjugation. It is thus argued that patriarchal foundations are imposed and reproduced through the coloniality of gender, which fundamentally transformed gender dynamics and relations of power. Rather than assuming limited Western gender binaries are a universal institution or feature of social organization across all societies, Lugones (2007) asserts that gender should be seen as more than a social construct, it is a colonial construct. For this reason, Lugones is highly critical of feminisms that assume the permanence of Eurocentric colonial binary understandings of sex and gender that treat heteronormativity as a universal norm. For Lugones, decoloniality requires destabilizing and disestablishing all forms of coloniality. As Lorde (2007) cautions, "the master's tools

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will never dismantle the master's house," a fitting warning in this context to convey how we cannot use colonial constructs to dismantle colonial constructs. It begs the question, how do we carve out a Samoan intersectional feminist space that centers a return to pre-colonial gender norms when Sāmoa and fa'a Sāmoa has been so heavily influenced and transformed by Christianity and colonization? How do we dismantle the master's house (or colonial constructs) when our home (Indigenous worldviews) has become interwoven with the master's house? We begin to answer these questions below by first outlining gender constructs in Sāmoa prior to Western influences before moving to discuss how they were transformed by the missionization and colonization of Sāmoa.

4. Christian cornerstones and new gender roles

Prior to the arrival of missionaries in Sāmoa in the early 1830s, understandings of sex and gender were fluid and extended far beyond limited binary notions of male–female, men–women, masculine–feminine, and other prescriptive and restrictive dichotomies. Gendered relations were also understood as being reciprocal, relational, and in pursuit of social balance and harmony. To give an example to think through reciprocal gendered relations and dynamics, in Sāmoa there is a cultural principle of feagaiga that guides and structures gendered relations. Feagaiga specifically refers to the sacred covenant and relationship between brothers and sisters that encompasses brothers serving, protecting, and nurturing their sisters. It is a life-long commitment of reciprocal service and support that works to achieve social harmony through gendered divisions of roles and responsibility organized along oppositional gendered lines. Oppositional in this sense should not be read as conflictual (Latai 2015). Rather, it is a relationship rooted in complementarity, underpinned by values of fa'aaloalo (mutual respect) and which centers the vā (sacred relational space) between the siblings (Tamasese 2009; Wendt 1999). Feagaiga is a relationship in pursuit of harmony that recognizes that achieving this is deeply dependent on the collective welfare of all those within the cosmos, including the living and non-living and in physical and spiritual worlds (Tamasese 2009). As such, feagaiga is a covenant to maintain harmony within and between the family, village, and community at large. As a construct, feagaiga ascribes particular gendered obligations and responsibilities. Brothers, for example, were taught to show deference to their sisters, because sisters were considered tamasā, the sacred offspring. Thus, girls or women were considered the most sacred of children and siblings, because they were regarded as intermediaries between the physical and supernatural world (Latai 2015). Sisters were perceived as sacred beings and therefore highly revered. Women also held priestly roles that served alongside matai (chiefs) in service to their families and communities (Finau 2017).

The centrality of feagaiga to pre-colonial and pre-Christian Sāmoa permeated through all aspects of social life. Women as feagaiga received the same level of respect and status afforded to matai or chiefs. In relation to spatial positioning at important family and social gatherings, sisters were afforded se'ese'e talaluma, of sitting at the front of the house, thereby conveying their revered status. In decision-making, their advice was sought and heeded. The power and influence of women also extended far beyond the confines of the family into Indigenous systems of governance or fa'amatai. In times when family gathered to consider matai (chiefly) appointments, it was the sisters as feagaiga who had the greatest level of influence over these appointments, including the power to claim the title for themself (Latai 2015). For context, the highest status roles in Sāmoa are appointed through the Indigenous fa'amatai governance system that involves

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bestowing various roles and ranks with differing levels of prestige and responsibility. Historically, the bestowal and appointment of matai were not determined or influenced by sex or gendered positioning but instead conferred based on family lineage onto deserving recipients as determined through their tautua (service) to their family, village, community, and society. For example, as previously mentioned, the highest and most revered matai titles (the four papa titles: Tui Atua, Tui Aʻana, Gatoaitele, and Vaetamasoaliʻi or, when held together, the Tafaʻifā) were first held by Queen Salamasina, who traced her lines of descent both patrilineally and matrilineally. Unlike patrilineal and patronymic norms of patriarchal societies, in pre-colonial Sāmoa, lines of descent and birth rights acquired through lineage could be traced through both patrilineal and matrilineal lines. Genealogy, as well as personal and political authority and status within a community, could be inherited from male or female ancestors as well as conferred on to female and male descendants. One's gendered position was not prohibitive or restrictive. Thus, women as feagaiga had considerable influence over the bestowal of matai/chiefly titles. In thinking back to reciprocal gender relations and achieving social balance, sisters would often afford the title to their brothers as a gesture of faʻaaloalo (mutual respect) for their tautua (service) to them, their family, and community. However, in situations where brothers did not adhere to or honor the principles or relationship of feagaiga, they would be overlooked, thereby not advancing into status positions of influence. Here we see how the feagaiga relationship and covenant plays an integral role in maintaining social harmony within the family, village, and society as a whole as well as achieving gender balance through processes and practices that support and promote reciprocal and collective power. What becomes clear is that, in pre-colonial and pre-Christian times, women from birth were afforded a privileged status and occupied positions of considerable influence and power. This status included the ability to determine men's access to power, as well as prohibiting men from attaining positions of power. Although cultural notions and practices of feagaiga remain, it has been heavily influenced and transformed by the missionization and colonization of Sāmoa.

One of the most perverse ways that Western gender norms have been established in Sāmoa is through religion and in particular Christianity. Sāmoa is one of 15 countries that are constitutionally Christian, with nations across the Pacific having some of the highest per capita rates of Christianity. In 2021, census data found that over 98% of the population identified as Christian (National University of Samoa Library CIP data 2022). The centralization of Christianity as a cornerstone of post-missionized and post-colonial Sāmoa is evident in the national motto: "e faʻavae Sāmoa i le Atua" which translates as Sāmoa is founded on God. The missionization, and subsequent colonization, of Sāmoa transformed the status of women (Schoeffel 1979, 1995; Gunson 1987; Dunlop 1998; Tcherkézoff and Douaire-Marsaudon 2008), undermining their influential roles as feagaiga as well as gatekeepers of Indigenous knowledges between physical and spiritual worlds. Models of gender based on reciprocity and relationality, with women, afforded by birth with positions of reverence and influence, as one part of the social balance of gender and power, shifted to new Victorian ideals embedded within Christian moralities that instructed the domestication (and "civilization") of women as wives, mothers, and carers (Gunson 1987; Schoeffel 1995). The spread of, and conversion to, Christianity in Sāmoa prompted a change in gender roles allocated to women and, importantly, the value ascribed to them. The ideals of Christianity (and modernity) were depicted by the gender order and nuclear heterosexual family structure of missionaries, with missionaries' wives as maternal homemakers being exemplified as "the ideal woman" and the nuclear family being

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hailed as the "proper" way for man and woman (or husband and wife) to live and for Samoan families to be organized. With these new and missionized understandings and approaches to gender and family came unequal hierarchical distributions of power and authority, with ideals of male dominance and female subservience enshrined as a doctrine of Christian principles and moralities. In this way, the missionization of Sāmoa and in particular, the spread of Christianity, introduced and embedded patriarchal gendered ideologies as being ordered and ordained by God.

The emphasis on nuclear family models and hyperfocus on the husband and wife relationship undermined the centrality of lineage and kin relations that extend far beyond the narrow confines of the nuclear family into the past, present, and future. And significantly, it sidelined the relationship and life-long covenant of feagaiga between brothers and sisters. As Latai (2015, 98) asserts:

> Once the practices and institutions that gave women much power were destabilised by missionaries, their influence as feagaiga was weakened, while their status as wives was emphasised. For women as sisters, this decline in power was not only political but sacred. Under the missionary dispensation, the old role of sacred sister or feagaiga was replaced by that of a sacred pastor. This shift meant that women's sacred status under the new order was devalued while the new figure of the pastor's sacred power was enhanced.

Thus, with the establishment of Christianity, the sacred power of women and status of feagaiga was transferred to the church, with pastors being regarded as feagaiga and afforded the special privileges once reserved for women. Thus, feagaiga and gendered cultural norms have been altered to the extent that a brother's service, protection, and nurturing is often enacted as control over their sisters and then wives; a cultural principle that is often interpreted as giving legitimate authority for boys, brothers, fathers to police girls, women, and wives, including hyper surveillance and control of women's sexuality. This reconfiguration of feagaiga in accordance with Christian morality demands Samoan women be good and dutiful wives, who raise good and dutiful daughters who go then on to be good and dutiful wives, thereby entrenching intergenerational socialization into, and transmission of, white Western Christian gender norms and values that have over time come to appear as a normal and natural feature of Samoan culture. The idea of Samoan women being "good" and in service to family and God is enforced through the disciplining of willfulness, which has subverted Indigenous gendered relations and dynamics that were based on reciprocity and a delicate balancing of the gender seesaw to become stark gender imbalances. The proliferation of Christianity reimagined the relationship of feagaiga by altering the meaning of complementarity from reciprocally complementary to complementary based on unequal hierarchical gender roles and responsibilities, which inscribed male dominance and female subservience in accordance with white Western social norms of the time.

Paradoxically, patriarchal power was established and maintained in white Western contexts through gendered divisions of labour and in particular, the separation of productive and reproductive labour. Men were relegated to the realm of productive public life as economic providers and women to the reproductive private realm as child-bearers and carers. Yet, in the Samoan context, women were stripped of their power despite continuing—past and present—to act as key financial providers for the family and village, for example, through their production of ie toga (fine mats) and siapo (tapa cloths), which not only generate wealth but are also required to fulfill important cultural

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duties, such as at weddings, funerals, or saofai (ceremonies to bestow chiefly titles).The paradox here lies in the fact that ideologically white Western colonial patriarchal ideas and structures of power, rooted in gendered divisions of labour that vest power in men's roles as income-earning providers (and thus women's subservience and reliance on men for economic provisioning), were imposed on Samoa. But, in the Samoan context, there exists a disconnect in the source of this patriarchal power, because women continue to fulfill central productive income-producing roles (and simultaneously reproductive roles) (Lopesi and Keil 2024). Thus, Samoan men are afforded patriarchal power that is grounded in Christianity but disentangled from gendered public/private divides and gendered divisions of labor, and disentangled in a way that does not limit their access to patriarchal power (while being simultaneously exempt from reproductive roles).

However, in this era of coloniality, cultural principles of faʻaaloalo (mutual respect) and vā (sacred relational space) operate as tools to disempower and pacify women from resisting, because resistance would not only go against religious teachings, which have become deeply interwoven with faʼa Sāmoa, but also disrupt the social harmony (Lopesi and Keil 2024). The spread of Christianity resulted in the cultural internalization of patriarchy, which affirmed the deterioration of the status and position of women and children in Samoan culture and society. The Christian missionaries were crucial agents in the process of social change and transformation of Samoan culture and society that resulted in the reordering of social and family life according to white Western Christian values, as well as the stigmatization of diverse sex and gender expressions.

The missionization and colonization of Samoa in the early 1800s resulted in the gradual change of the faʼamatai system (Tcherkézoff 2000a, 2000b). As a result, there is a lack of general consensus among Samoans about the rights of women to hold matai titles. Meleisea et al. (2015) demonstrate three dominant albeit divergent discourses shaping ideas about women holding matai titles. For some, it is seen as an Indigenous customary right for women to hold matai as demonstrated by historical legacies and genealogies of prominent female matai (e.g., Salamasina see: Schoeffel 1987), and for others it is perceived as an acceptable "modern" custom that is responsive to changing roles of women in contemporary (post-colonial) times, while for others, it is treated as a customary right reserved only for men. As a result of these varied and competing discourses, the rights and thus ability of women to hold matai vary across districts, with some village councils holding regulations that bar women from claiming and holding matai titles, such as Leulumoega, Lufilufi, and Afega. Despite these varied discourses and belief-systems, matai is a status predominantly held by men. It has been estimated that women constitute approximately 5% of matai (and men 95%) (National University of Samoa 2022). Women are not only under-represented as matai, they are also under-represented in government, constituting only 10% of parliament. There is an explicit connection between holding a matai title and position in parliament (that was established at Samoa's independence in 1962): one cannot run or be elected to government without holding a matai title. Thus, excluding or barring women from the faʻamatai system advertently bars them from participating in government and, thus, matters that affect the entire country (Huffer and Soʻo 2000). Here we see the integration of Indigenous Samoan and Westminster governance systems, and in particular how they work in unison to disempower women from holding positions of influence. The gross over-representation of men and under-representation of women has tangible and material consequences, further entrenching missionized and colonized gendered-cultural norms, which are fundamentally at odds with the distribution of power, authority, and influence within pre-contact Indigenous Sāmoa.

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Thus, what is imagined today as being "traditional" faʻa Sāmoa can be argued to be an amalgamation of colonized and missioned versions of faʻa Sāmoa with Indigenous faʻa Sāmoa. In this vein, we assert that Sāmoa is not founded on patriarchal values. Rather, Christian colonial patriarchal values were imposed on Sāmoa and this fundamentally reshaped the position of Samoan women. In this way, we might reimagine these foundations to consider the notion of a return, as being a decolonial effort to re/indigenize our understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality, by reframing these foundations as patriarchal stilts that have been established atop of the foundations of Indigenous Sāmoa. Religion, and more aptly, Christianity, has been central to maintaining and reproducing patriarchal hierarchical gender relations. It is the fuel that maintains cisheteropatriarchy, and disciplines Samoan women and girls to be good tamaʻitaʻi Sāmoa (daughters of Sāmoa). The firm place of Christianity, coupled with independence, an overwhelming majority Samoan population, and seemingly uninterrupted cultural practice creates a unique context for thinking through Samoan feminist possibilities.

While not discussed in depth here, it is worth noting that today more Samoans live in diaspora in New Zealand, the United States, Australia, and beyond than do on the archipelagos of Sāmoa and American Sāmoa combined. In diaspora, the church still figures as a significant community site for Samoans and the idealized version of Samoan womanhood extends into the Samoan diaspora. Hence many of these ideas of gender travel with diasporic populations and are compounded with factors of class and race (and in particular, of occupying minority racial/ethnic position in a settler colonial context). Samoan activist and scholar Misatauveve Melani Anae has written on her own experiences of living in New Zealand and the disciplining while in the Polynesian Panthers, an activist group formed in the 1960s to end racial and ethnic inequalities against Pacific and Indigenous populations in New Zealand. Her activism, which was in service to Pacific communities, garnered "accusations of being, on the one hand, ulavale (cheeky, disrespectful) or moe pī (a bed-wetter), and on the other, the shit-stirrer or black sheep of the family" (Anae 2020, 124–25). Her activism and willfulness were seen as being antithetical to the "good" Samoan woman, seen not heard.

5. To Samoan feminisms

Thinking through the particular way that gender imbalances have been imposed on, and now exist within, Samoan culture demonstrates the need to develop uniquely Samoan strands of feminist thought. It seems colonization has been so successful that it has been able to operate even as colonial powers have left. Untangling coloniality then becomes a delicate act that requires an understanding of Indigenous Sāmoa, gender, sexuality, and race as interlocking structures that oppress some more than others. Thus, we assert that feminism has a place in Sāmoa and its diasporas. Working towards decolonial Indigenous Samoan feminist thought centering Sāmoa's unique histories and epistemologies in ways that are not painted (or tainted) by Eurocentric ideologies and institutions nor homogenized under the broad umbrella of Pacific, Ocean, Indigenous, or decolonial feminisms, leads us to another set of questions. How do we go about beginning this untangling work? How might we articulate and envision feminist possibilities that weave together Indigenous cultural values with contemporary Sāmoa to restore gender balance? While these are questions that we will continue to contemplate and grapple with, in this final section, we hope to emphasize the importance, as hooks did in relation to Black feminism, of Samoan feminist thought for everyone.

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Additionally, understanding the specifics of Samoan feminism and sharpening our own self-definition makes Samoan feminists better allies to wider feminist coalitions, so that "real advances can be made" (Lorde 2007, 46).

Indigenous feminisms are about decolonial returns to pre-colonial gender relations, which unsettles coloniality as well as the place of patriarchy within contemporary Indigenous cultures. In the Samoan context, decolonial returns involve a return to a worldview where all genders are balanced, empowered, and organized around reciprocal relationships that center the vā (or relational and spiritual space that nurtures individual and collective well-being). Such a focus shifts away from other feminisms thinking about "equality" or "equity" toward a focus on reciprocity and relationality, which by consequence fosters equitable relations between all those in the cosmos, including women, men, and all genders. Moreover, centralizing the vā shows care and respect for the connections that exist between the past, present, and future generations. So Samoan Indigenous feminisms then could be thought of as a return to what Paula Gunn Allen (1986, 30) describes as "other times, in other circumstances more congenial to womanhood and more cognizant of the proper place of Woman as creatix and shaper of existence in the tribe and on the earth, everyone knew that women played a separate and significant role in tribal reality." Samoan feminism is a decolonial effort or return that requires the unweaving of colonialities of power, gender, and culture. It is decolonial work that enables and empowers us all.

Feminist thought is compatible with faʻa Sāmoa, because Indigenous Sāmoa was feminist by virtue of Indigenous (pre-colonial, pre-Christian) culture. As Trask (1996, 906) reminds us, "In Pacific Island cultures, genealogy is paramount." In Sāmoa, our lineage and history shows us that we were feminist by culture and praxis. While the church and current political systems may obfuscate that at times, there are still histories, and legacies to be restored. Thus, feminism is not a threat to Samoan cultural norms, customs, and values, but a way of enhancing and fostering a culture that has a long history of valuing and celebrating all genders and beings. Feminism is decolonial, because it works towards recovering and revitalising Indigenous ideologies and epistemologies related to gender balance and relationships based on reciprocity. Rather than resisting or rejecting feminism, we should be collaboratively working together to cultivate uniquely Samoan strands of feminism that speak to our position as Samoan women, people, and communities: a feminism that enacts values of tautua and tapuaʻi (service and support), and centralizes the vā (relational space) between all those that exist in that space, which includes serving and supporting women and children, men, families, communities, and societies in Sāmoa and the diasporas.

Decoloniality allows us to think what might be beyond the imposed patriarchal gender system to envision decolonial futures that exceed limited Western colonial categories and understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality as well as feminist possibilities. Theorizing that draws on Western and colonial understandings and approaches to gender, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and feminism more generally are no doubt useful for understanding the internal dynamics of systems of oppression and coloniality of power. But they also hide alternative ways of knowing and being that come from times before coloniality. Put differently, in order to think and be decolonial, we need to continue to go beyond colonial-religious-hetero-patriarchal-binary understandings of gender, to open up the possibility of overcoming the "feminist failure of vision" (Trask 1996, 911) by decentering whiteness and epistemologies that reproduce and perpetuate coloniality of power and gender under the guise of tradition or faʻa Sāmoa. This requires shifting the post-colonial position of Sāmoa to see the need for a decolonial lens.

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Samoan feminist thought then takes inspiration from other Indigenous feminisms that draw their sense of feminism from "their own various Indigenous traditions of honoring women's power, gender diversity, and gender balance: traditions that have often been repressed by colonialism but are being revitalized with great care" (Arvin 2019a, 339–40). We understand Indigenous feminisms as having their own genealogies back to Indigenous cosmologies grounded in place and Indigenous worldviews that recognize the connections between socio-cultural-spatial-spiritual-and-physical worlds as well as ancestral lineages. That means that it is not Indigenous feminism singular, but rather Indigenous feminisms in the plural (Underhill-Sem 2019). Thus, Indigenous feminism exists as a coalitional framework across Indigenous communities, capacious enough to hold the specificity required in each and every Indigenous context.

In the 1970s, the Black lesbian feminist Combahee Collective wrote about the importance of theorizing from one's own identity, because history has proven that the only "people willing to focus on their particular type of oppression are . . . themselves" (Taylor 2022, 121). One could say that, similarly, the only people truly invested in the social position of Samoan women are Samoans. Building on Combahee writings, one's position, lived experience, and praxis then are a site of political analysis and political practice simultaneously. In the Samoan feminist context that means a critical examination of one's life at the intersection of faʻa Sāmoa, gender, class, race, and any other matrix of power one exists within. Similarly, as Native Hawaiian activist Haunani-Kay Trask (1996, 911) argues, "it is not theory that gives rise to praxis but the reverse." We have established Pacific feminist agendas, priorities, and activities happening in our Island nations and across the region, diaspora, and Moana. There are feminist activities occurring at all levels of society; from micro-levels of the individual and family to meso-levels of the wider kin and community to macro-levels of society and region. We are—and have been—mobilizing, collectivizing, and working on the ground to improve the social, economic, political, and material conditions and realities of women, and, thus society more generally, in and across the Pacific and diaspora.

The historic desire for Indigenous Pacific feminisms was captured in Vanessa Griffen's (1987) Pacific Women's Workshop report. The workshop included facilitated sessions on developing a Pacific feminist perspective, and the report summarized the debate as follows:

> A Pacific feminism would be defined by Pacific women and cover issues that were relevant to them, such as cultural imperialism for example. Pacific women needed to develop a feminist ideology to analyse the wider issues of women's struggles, which were important to them as women and as Pacific people—for example, all forms of dominance, social inequalities, and the role and influence of institutions such as the church. It would allow Pacific women to question in a different way issues such as colonialism and imperialism. Having a feminist perspective would influence the questions Pacific women asked about institutions and enable women to challenge conditions and cultural practices that contribute to their oppression. (Griffen 1987, 21)

Griffen's (1987) report further highlighted the importance of adopting a Pacific-specific feminism, which it defined as "a perspective that women in the Pacific could live and work with" and which is a perspective that conveys what feminism means to Pacific women (Griffen 1987, 8). Those who took part in the workshop noted that working out our own ideas of a feminism would produce "a greater sharing, a greater sisterhood" (Griffen 1987, 21).

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We are inspired by feminist agitators for change, the feminisms in plural, the decolonial, Indigenous, Black, and women of color, who broadened the horizons of feminist thought by critiquing the universal overtones of whitestream feminism and paving the way for discrete, distinct, and intersecting feminisms to emerge and exist. As feminist scholars have established, feminism doesn't resonate or work with a simple copy and paste to culture and context. Rather, feminisms are contextual and subjective. It is thus imperative that those from within various contexts and communities continue to broaden understandings and conceptualizations of feminism, which works toward demarcating and carving out a space for feminist thought that illuminates multiple, diverse and intersecting subjectivities and positionalities. As such, the task for us as Samoan women, people, and communities is to develop a feminist space that encompasses and fosters a by-us, for-us, with-us approach. We are encouraged by those who were in resistance in the Mau Movement, who advocated for a "Sāmoa mo Sāmoa" (or Sāmoa for Sāmoa and Sāmoa by Sāmoa), to challenge coloniality in Sāmoa and articulate feminist possibilities and futures. We take strength from our ancestors who navigated the oceans, we stand in our ancestral power as we continue this work of navigating our way back to a return to Indigenous concepts of gender. Importantly, this advocacy for Samoan feminist thought is not a self-aggrandizing project. Rather the regeneration (Simpson 2011; Arvin 2019b) of Samoan feminisms brings about new life for everyone. It ushers forth new ways to contest coloniality and patriarchy, in coalition and relationship with others to "make such fights more sustainable for all of us" (Arvin 2019a, 340) and continue the Samoan decolonial project.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have advocated for the need to develop Samoan feminist thought. We outlined suspicions around feminism within Samoan contexts, and drew out the connections, interconnections, and disconnections between various strands of Indigenous, Black, and women of color feminist thought with decolonial and intersectional underpinnings. We then discussed the coloniality of power and gender in Sāmoa, uncovering the ways that imposed religion, morals, and politics have impacted gendered power relations in Sāmoa and how this expands out to the diaspora. Finally, we ended with a call to develop Samoan feminist thought based on the lived experiences of Samoan women who are uniquely positioned to do the work of untangling the coloniality of power and gender. Remembering a feminism within Samoan culture prior to colonization locates Samoan feminist ideas in its Indigenous genealogy, pre-dating the establishment of academic feminist theory and scholarship. Importantly this also works to shake feminism's stigma within Samoan communities. At the same time, we acknowledge that it is an argument that can also tie Indigenous feminists to ideas of cultural purity or self-essentialization. While it has been a useful discussion for the purposes of this article, we see the future strands of Samoan feminism in the multiple, drawing on varied genealogies of one's own Samoan feminism.

While we have spent some time discussing the stigma of feminism within Samoan and Pacific contexts, we hope in this paper to draw a line on that discussion from here on. We take inspiration from the words of fellow Pacific feminists Celia Bardwell-Jones, Joyce Pualani Warren, and Stephanie Nohelani Teves who "have left behind (and you should too) the age-old debates of whether or not Native women could or would want to be feminist and instead are surging ahead with 'doing' Native feminism" (2022, 97). We are not interested in demarcating what we are not. Rather the future work of Samoan

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feminism is advocating for what we are. We are Samoan women and we stand in our ancestral power on the backs of our ancestors and intersectional feminist mothers and sisters. We hear their call and we echo their calls of articulating, cultivating, and carving out a space for Samoan feminist theory, thought, and praxis.

Notes

1 Samoan translation in brackets

2 We are writing specifically about the political position of Sāmoa. While there are similarities with American Sāmoa, their political position as a US territory and histories of militarism and demilitarization also make the context of the eastern islands distinct.

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