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ANTHROPOLOGY

Aspects of Family Organization Among Samoan Immigrants to Hawaii.¹

Between June, 1951 and July, 1952 more than one thousand Samoans immigrated to the Territory of Hawaii. This paper discusses briefly the main facts of the migration and certain aspects of family organization among the Samoan immigrants. The observations on which the paper is based were made of thirty Samoan families 14 to 20 months after their arrival in Hawaii.

The movement of these Samoans came about as a consequence of the withdrawal of the United States Navy from American Samoa in 1951. During the preceding 50 years the Navy, because of its interest in the Naval Base at Pago Pago, had been in administrative control of the islands of American Samoa. For a variety of reasons, including the decreasing importance of the Naval Base, the administration of the islands was transferred to the United States Department of the Interior in 1951. As the Navy had employed many Samoans and indirectly provided employment for others, the change in administration created a rather severe economic problem for the 18,000 residents of American Samoa.

In an effort to ease the economic crisis brought about by its departure the Navy offered passage to Hawaii to any Samoan Naval personnel and their dependents as well as to any other Samoan who wished to emigrate. Only two requirements were made of the immigrants; they were required to pass a medical examination and to provide proof of their status as American nationals.² The Navy per-

¹Based on a paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association at Santa Monica, December, 1956. The study was aided by a grant from the American Association for the Advancement of Science through the Hawaiian Academy of Science.

²Due to the ease of movement between American and New Zealand Samoa the second requirement was difficult, if not impossible, to enforce.

sonnel and their dependents were transported to Hawaii free of charge. Other Samoans were charged a nominal fare and were required to have a sponsor in Hawaii. These non-Navy persons fell into two major categories; younger Samoans who were moving to Hawaii in order to join the U.S. Armed Services, and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints who wished to perform their Temple Service at the Mormon Temple near Honolulu.³

In all, 80 Samoans arrived in Honolulu in 1951 and a further 958 in 1952. The 1951 arrivals were all Navy personnel. The main body in 1952 was composed of 458 Navy personnel and dependents; 218 persons planning to join one of the services; 282 civilians, mostly Mormons.

The arrival of the 1952 immigrants was preceded by rumors in Honolulu to the effect that they were suffering from a variety of contagious diseases.⁴ Honolulu authorities therefore insisted upon a further medical examination before the Samoans were permitted to land. Although the results of this examination were negative, the Samoans spent a very unpleasant twenty-four hours waiting on board ship. The publicity attending their arrival undoubtedly influenced the manner in which they were received by the local population.

After landing in Honolulu, the Samoans not associated with the Navy moved into the general community. The Navy personnel and their dependents were housed in the Naval Housing Area at Pearl Harbor. The comments below are concerned only with the residents of the Naval Housing Area.

In the summer of 1953 there were 50 Samoan families living in the Naval Housing Area representing a total of 320 individuals. 30 of these families were randomly selected for interviewing. The schedule used for the interviews contained questions covering both the life

³Temple Service involves the sealing of marriages, one's own and one's ancestor's, for eternity. It is a necessary part of Mormon religious observance and can only be performed in a Temple. Until 1958 the only Temple in the Pacific was located on the Island of Oahu, T. H. about fifty miles from Honolulu. Recently a Temple has been completed near Hamilton in New Zealand.

⁴The rumors were apparently founded on the fact that the immigrants carried inactive filariasis in the blood stream. As later reports indicated, both local and naval authorities were aware of this fact but considered it of no importance. Their opinion was apparently quite justified. For news reports concerning the Samoan immigrants and the discussions precipitated by their arrival see the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin Advertiser* for May, June and July 1952.

of the family before leaving Samoa and the period spent in Hawaii. The purpose of the interview was not only to gather as much information as possible in a short time but also to establish acquaintance with some of the families. On the whole, this was successful and between June and December of 1953 fairly regular and informal contact was maintained with most of the 30 families.

There was no satisfactory way of gaining information about the way of life of these families in Samoa other than by asking them. Information from anthropological sources, even if recent, was not satisfactory as it must be assumed in migrations of this sort that some selective factor has been operative in determining which people will choose to emigrate. In this particular case, since the persons interviewed had all been associated with the United States Navy in Samoa, they may well have represented the most "Americanized" Samoans. Thus in the present paper few inferences can be made about the effects of change of residence on the behavior of the Samoans. Differences between the observations made in Hawaii and the existing ethnological reports from Samoa could be due to changes in Samoa, selective factors in the migration, or changes in Hawaii.

In order to have some check on the information received in the interviews with Samoans and also to provide a basis for statements about local standards, 17 interviews were conducted with non-Samoan families in the Naval Housing Area using the same schedule as was used with the Samoans. These non-Samoan interviews omitted, of course, questions dealing specifically with Samoa or Samoan customs.

Conditions in the Housing Area can best be described as urban. Families were housed in apartments which had a first and second floor. There were four such apartments in a large frame building. The buildings were spaced at regular intervals in symmetrically planned blocks and surrounded by lawns but with few trees and shrubs to provide privacy or to break the monotonous appearance of the area.⁵ Apartments were allocated by the Naval authorities strictly on the basis of availability. As a result the Samoan families were distributed at random and there was only one instance in which two Samoan

⁵Such conditions stand in marked contrast to the tree lined Samoan village located on the beach. See for example M. Mead, 1949. *Coming of Age in Samoa*, (New York, Mentor Books.)

families lived in the same block forming, as they did, such a small proportion of a population numbering in the thousands. The majority of the non-Samoans in the Housing Area were predominantly mainland Americans although there were representatives of a wide variety of ethnic groups.

Information gathered early in the summer of 1953 indicated that during their first year of residence the Samoans had had almost no social contact with their non-Samoan neighbors. (For example, only two Samoan families had visited the apartments of non-Samoans during this period, and no more than six Samoans had even spoken to their neighbors.) This lack of contact seemed to be due in large measure to the bad publicity associated with the arrival of the Samoans. This was shown by the fact that most of the non-Samoans justified their avoidance of the Samoans on the grounds of health.

Family Organization:

In a brief summary of the main ethnological reports on Samoan culture, G. P. Murdock makes the following statements about the Samoan family:

"The strongest social tie in Samoa is the bond of kinship. Actual degrees of relationship in our sense are recognized, but such distinctions carry little weight. Kinship terms are not employed in social intercourse; a child, for instance, addresses his parents by their personal names rather than as "mother" and "father." In practice all relatives are lumped together under one term, *ainga*, irrespective of whether they are allied by blood in the male or female line, by adoption, or by marriage, though in the last case the relationship endures only so long as the marriage exists or children survive to bind the two families together. This body of relatives, though of considerable theoretical importance, actually functions as a group only at births, marriages, and deaths. Kinship involves reciprocal privileges and obligations, which reflect a marked strain of communism with regard to property. People may visit their kinsmen, or flee to them for refuge, and remain as long as they like without compensation. When any one builds a house or boat, pays a fine, or assembles a dowry, it is assumed that all his relatives will aid in raising the necessary sum. No one, for fear of being thought stingy, will refuse to give or lend an object for which a kinsman expresses a desire, even though it be a piece of tapa just completed after weeks of painstaking labor. The recipient is expected eventually to render some approximately equal favor, so the privilege is rarely abused. Though this system may dull individual initiative, it removes the fear of poverty. The aged and incapacitated can never lack food, shelter and clothing. "How is it?" the natives incredulously exclaim when Europeans speak of a man as poor, "No food! Has he no friends? No house to live in! Are there no houses

belonging to his friends?" (G. P. Murdock, 1934. *Our Primitive Contemporaries*, New York, The Macmillan Company, page 58.)

"The unit of social and economic life is the household. Unlike our own biological family of parents and children the Samoan household may embrace as many as fifty persons occupying several adjoining houses. It is really a large joint family, patriarchal in character, acknowledging the authority of one headman (*matai*), to whom the members of the family are unusually related by blood, adoption, or marriage. This family head invariably holds a title of some kind, and is treated with the respect due his rank." (*Ibid*, page 60.)

Using this brief statement as a starting point the characteristics of the Samoan families in Hawaii will be discussed under three heads, the nuclear family, the extended family, and *matai*.

21 of the 30 families interviewed had existed as nuclear families in Samoa while the remaining 9 had been living as part of extended family units. The average length of marriage for the thirty couples interviewed was 8.6 years with an average age at marriage of 24.4 for males and 20.8 for females.

When asked whom they thought should be "the head of the house" 25 of the 30 couples agreed in replying that it should be the man. The five other couples agreed in two cases that it should be the woman and in three cases that man and wife were equal. It was interesting that this question provoked an immediate response from the Samoans. In contrast, most of the non-Samoan families considered the question to be meaningless or answered, "It depends on the situation" or "It depends on the people themselves." The justification of male dominance for the 25 Samoan families took several forms; a. It was the traditional Samoan custom for the man to be the decision maker and the arbiter of disputes; b. "God made the man first and he should be the boss"; c. The man being head of the family is the *palagi* (European) way of doing things; d. "I bring home the money and my wife does what I tell her."

However, this apparent patriarchal system was not observable in practice. Almost all (28 out of 30) of the families arrived at any decision of importance after joint consultation between husband and wife, and sometimes children. (e.g., large expenditures of money, problems with children.) In some less important features of family life there was what might be called a mild male dominance when

the Samoan families were compared with the non-Samoans in the Housing Area. For instance, although 21 of the Samoan families had cars none of the women were able to drive, nor did any of the women have separate bank accounts or even joint bank accounts with their husbands. Further, most of the Samoan women hesitated to invite their friends to the house (even other Samoan housewives) without first consulting their husbands. Husbands on the other hand frequently invited people to their homes without any attempt to forewarn their wives. The contrast between the Samoan and non-Samoan families in these respects was quite pronounced, even though the economic circumstances of the families were similar. The 17 non-Samoan women were all able to drive and had frequent access to the family car; 12 of them had their own bank account or one held jointly with their husbands. In matters of visiting there was freedom for either husband or wife to ask guests to the house but, with the exception of visits between housewives during the day, it was rare for one to act without first consulting the other.

During the six months contact with the Samoan families an increasing "freedom" was noticed in the behavior of the women. In consequence it seems likely that the subordinate behavior of the women noted above was a function of their lack of experience rather than a result of any intrinsic characteristic of the Samoan family system. The men were forced into continued contact with non-Samoans in the course of their employment. The lack of experience with the customs of the Hawaiian community was shown by the constant questioning of the writer by the Samoan women. Most of the questions were of the form "What do the *palagi* do about . . . ?", and to understand their frequency it must be remembered that the Samoan women had had almost no opportunity for contact with their non-Samoan neighbors during their year of residence in Hawaii. The husbands and wives themselves felt that their relationships had changed very little as a result of their change in residence. The general impression gained by questions and discussions about this aspect of family relations was that once the Samoan women had had the opportunity to discover how other people acted in Hawaii it would not be long before they arranged their lives on the same pattern as the non-Samoan.

In the relationship between parents and children there had been greater change. This was due largely to differences in environment. There was very little opportunity for the children in the housing area to make use of natural sources of entertainment such as streams and the ocean, which they had enjoyed in Samoa. Further there were no relatives nearby for the children to visit either for pleasure or in times of crisis in their own homes. These circumstances had the effect of throwing the children into the company of their parents much more frequently than had been the case before the families left Samoa. In addition the children were rapidly acquiring a much greater facility with the English language than their parents. It was therefore not surprising to find that all the parents felt more tension in dealing with their children than they remembered in Samoa. They frequently pointed out that they were much more prone to punish their children in Hawaii than they had ever been before. Several of them explained that they had never hit their children and would not have dreamed of doing so back in Samoa but in Hawaii conditions were so different that they sometimes did so.

Although these people showed a genuine fondness for children, most hoped they would have no further additions to their families. The reason for this was the "hard conditions" in Hawaii. By this they meant a combination of things, such as the economic problem of depending solely on wages and having to consider the future, the general unfriendliness of the people in Hawaii, and the general limitations on one's freedom of action. (e.g. Many of the Samoans felt very badly about having to pay for everything in Hawaii. It was a very pungent joke among them at this time to suggest that one would soon be charged for breathing.) These objections to Hawaii make a good deal of sense when compared with the quotation from Murdock above. The strength of their feelings on this subject were shown by the fact that not one Samoan had at that time any desire to come to the mainland United States where, they believed, conditions were even worse from their point of view. The other side of the picture was, of course, that most of them desired to return to Samoa as soon as they could and more than half of them hoped their children would return also. (In this respect more of the women wanted their children to "go home" than did the men.) The educational

advantages of living in Hawaii were stressed by a good many of them but they hoped that their children would get a "good education" and then return to Samoa where they could do some good for their people.

Extended family relations for these people meant the continuation of ties with Samoa, as no extended family units had come to Hawaii. Even though only 9 of the families interviewed had been living as members of extended family households before leaving Samoa all 30 had extensive kinship ties in Samoa and most of them had been accustomed to gain the permission of the family *matai* before undertaking an enterprise of importance. (e.g., marriage, joining the Navy, etc.)

The extent to which the Samoan families in Hawaii were living up to their obligations to their kin was shown by the fact that 25 of the 30 families were sending money every week to relatives in Samoa. 3 of these were in addition supporting relatives who had recently come to Hawaii. The 5 families not sending money to Samoa had done so until a few months prior to the study. It was apparent from conversations with the Samoans that this assistance to relatives was an economic burden they were finding hard to continue. The entire matter of extended family relations was of great concern. Few persons had crystallized their thinking on the subject but as soon as it was raised they were likely to say "I've just been thinking about that", or "My wife and I were talking about that just the other night." Here again there was considerable curiosity about the *palagi* way of getting along with relatives.

In the six months of contact a marked change was noticeable in the matter of extended family obligations. By December of 1953 quite a few families had stopped sending money to Samoa. The usual reason given was the *matai* (by whom the money was distributed) back in Samoa was taking more than his share or was not distributing the money equitably. As far as could be ascertained they had no grounds for these accusations. Furthermore a number of them had become vocal proponents of a welfare program for the old people in Samoa. All of these opinions were bolstered by the argument that a man's major responsibility was to his wife and children and that he should not be burdened by other obligations. At the end of the

study it appeared that continued assistance of relatives was likely to disappear very quickly.

The whole question of the *matai* was one that aroused a vigorous response in any Samoan household where it was mentioned. Briefly the situation appeared to be that while those persons in Hawaii who had been *matai* in Samoa had no authority in Hawaii beyond the bounds of their own nuclear family they were entitled in the eyes of the Samoans to a certain amount of respect in view of their previous status. However, several former *matai* believed that they had the right to exercise some authority over Samoans in Hawaii and in some circumstances speak for the Samoan community.

This difference of opinion had provoked a considerable amount of conflict, particularly in the case of one individual. His previous *matai* status had been recognized by the Navy authorities in Hawaii and they looked upon him as a spokesman for all Samoans. In this capacity, in spite of the hostility of the other Samoans, he had acted as spokesman for the Samoans, and committed them to several types of community activity. All the non-Samoans in the housing area believed him to be the "chief".

The majority of the Samoans felt very strongly that all Samoans (like any other people) were equal and that no person should have more authority than another in community affairs. But in spite of this they continued to carry out the instructions and directions of the "chief". Even more interesting was the fact that most of them hoped to become *matai* when they returned to Samoa. Several of them had their future plans laid with some care. Believing that their stay in Hawaii was temporary and that it should be put to some good purpose, they planned to save as much money as possible and then return to Samoa where they would use their savings to put on a spectacular display of generosity which would assure them, they felt, of becoming *matai*. Thereafter they could retire and enjoy themselves. While it is not likely that any of them will actually do this their rather bitter suggestion sums up quite well the predominant community attitude; disenchantment with the *matai* system and a certain amount of envy of the *matai* themselves.

This short paper has described a few characteristics of the family system of a number of Samoan immigrants to Hawaii. The circum-

stances of the migration, particularly the lack of information for the families before they left Samoa, make it impossible to come to any general statements about the effect of the change of residence on the patterns of family organization. However, there is the gradual breaking down of certain characteristic features of Samoan social organization over the period during which the immigrants were observed, 14 to 20 months after their arrival.