

Power positioning in the Samoan society: a reconceptualising of the relational space (va) in Samoa's framework of power relations

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to critically review the concept of va in the context of Samoan power relations. It is premised on the argument that the political dimension pertaining to its philosophical tenets and ideological implications has not been fully verified in the existing literature or at least acknowledged as it deserves. The argument is posited that this anomaly has resulted in a rather incoherent, if not static overview of the concept as the literature seemed to present. As such, previous research has promoted a functional, ethnographic description of va which while doing justice to Samoan social ethics ideally, comes at a cost of a power narrative side-tracked, with the adverse impact of its practice, overlooked.

In this review, the core hypothesis is propounded, that va or the relational space that underpins Samoan social structures and institutions can only be unpacked in depth by acknowledging the centrality of power in that space; that va is the point of convergence where power is situated, recognized, and executed; a dynamic space of political activity where power stakeholders deliberate and negotiate daily. Such verification has become ever more pertinent, with regard to the latest developments in Samoan power relations, pressing a demand for an explanation of political conundrums unfolding in their wake.

Participants & Methodology

A total of twenty participants were involved in the study's investigation that included both Samoa and New Zealand. Eleven participants were based in Samoa, and nine reside in New Zealand. Out of the twenty participants, seventeen were interviewed in person in the field. Two of the participants answered the questionnaires electronically and later sent back to the researcher. In selecting the participants, the aim has been to ensure that a wide representation of the sectors of the population is reflected in the sampling and data. To that extent, the intent was to focus mainly on members of the public who have a fair grasp of the power conception and who also deal with power consciously and proactively (Yin, 2014). Thus, children, or those at age range of nineteen and below were not included. Purposeful sampling has its merits (Patton, 2002, although the overriding intent was for a fair representation of the population. In saying that, more than eighty unidentified individuals were randomly engaged in chance conversations for their views on Samoan politics in general; all of this data served as the thesis' anecdotal evidence.

In collecting data, I have adopted a mixed methods approach (Plano Clark and Ivankova, 2016). My rationale is clear from this, in that two or more methods will provide a much broader, deeper, and useful body of information (Plano Clark and Ivankova, 2016). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie and Turner (2007) define mixed methods as a research inquiry that employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and partnership. Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) commented on the strength of a mixed methods design in terms of its use of qualitative and quantitative, since these in combination, provide a better understanding of the research problems than the case if using a single method study only. Plano Clark and Ivankova (2016) summed up the fundamental principle of mixed methods research, noting that research methods should be

integrated or mixed, building on their complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses. To this end, five methods have been selected for my purpose. These are: a. interviews – semi-structured and unstructured; b. Case studies; c. *Fa'afaletui* approach; d. document analysis; and e. general observations.

Two procedures were employed for data analysis: the Thematic Analysis Technique (hereafter TAT) and Fairclough's Analytic Procedure (hereafter FAP). First, the advantage of Thematic Analysis is that data collation are well documented. As Braun and Clarke (2006) pointed out, its theoretical freedom provides for a highly flexible approach that can be modified for the needs of many studies, providing a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). Nowell, Norris and White (2017) suggested that thematic analysis should be considered a method, arguing that it is a qualitative research method that can be widely used for a range of epistemologies and research questions. Basically, it is a method for identifying, analysing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Boyatzis (1998) referred to thematic analysis as a translator for those speaking the languages of qualitative and quantitative analysis; TAT enables researchers who use different methods to communicate with each other (cited in Nowell, et al., 2017).

Fairclough's Analytic Procedure (FAP) on the other hand emphasizes both critique of linguistic form and semantics. It is an application by Fairclough (1989, 1996) of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). It promotes the theme of CDA; that is to critically investigate language use within social contexts. FAP consists of three interrelated dimensions of discourse (Janks, 1997), tied to three interrelated methods of analysis. The three dimensions are: the object of analysis (including verbal, visual or verbal and visual texts); the processes by means of which the object is produced and received (writing/speaking/designing and reading/ listening/viewing) by human subjects; and the socio-historical conditions/context which govern these processes. In total, the object of analysis in this investigation was about Samoan power relations, wrapped up in the language and the culturally embedded processes by which power is encoded/decoded and maintained intergenerationally.

Theoretical postulation

I begin with the postulation that any explanation on Samoan power relations needs to begin with the Samoan concept of *va* or the relational space involving people. First, this is because such space is the essence of virtually every form or type of human activity in Samoan society (Tui Atua, 2018; Anae, 2017; Wendt, 1996). Second, while literature on Samoan politics has focused mainly on the conventional dual relationship between state power and traditional authority (*pulega faamatai*), this paper argues that Samoan power relations are the works of multiple players, differing discourses and a predominant ideology (Tavita, 2021). As it follows, research has yet to address other relations pertaining to the *va* for reasons only a critical approach can unravel. Technically, Samoan society is governed under a plural system; it is comprised of Western based law and democratic ideals, the village government ethos also known as the *faamatai*, and church government with at least twenty practising denominations, each with own system of political control. In addition, there is also the historical outreach of transnational power relations influencing the *va*. The outcome is a syncretic mix, which is subsequently manifested in modern dilemmas of power (Tavita, 2021).

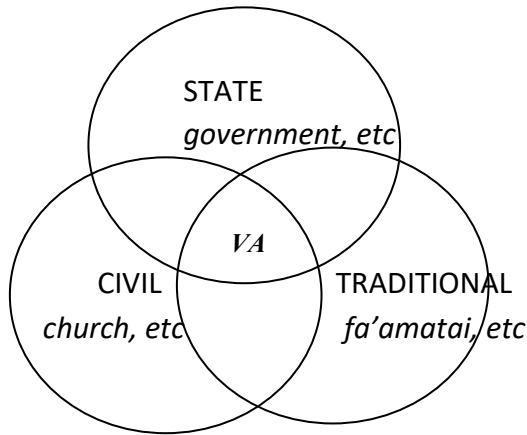
The paper makes the assertion that, firstly, the *va* concept has not been given full justice, due to the fact that Samoa's power relations are complex, having involved a set of multiple power narratives, of which the most powerful support the status quo. Secondly, by the emergence of a strong state, for instance, in the former ruling party, the Human Rights Protection Party, has demonstrated how the new configuration and diffusion of power

within the space (*va*), has impacted on modern leadership in the way that they use power productively, or otherwise. The latter will serve as a case study to this affirmation of *va* as central to understanding Samoan power politics or its evolution in contemporary Samoan society. Central to the findings is the role of a reconfigured culture in positioning political power in the modern relational space (*va*), whereby such influence orbits more towards the state.

Finally, this article is a product of a thesis research by the writer on the topic of power relations in Samoa; it was intended to be a summary analysis of the thesis; hence the reader will have a much clearer view of its purpose by referring also to the full thesis that is available online freely.¹

In studying the problem, the thesis adopted a critical conceptual approach, mainly in the lenses of three political theorists, Antonio Gramsci, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michel Foucault in association with critical theory traditions.²

The confluence of power relations in modern Samoa: three authorities (pule)



Va as a conceptual approach to studying Samoan power relations

A simple description of the word ‘power’ is, the ability or right to control people and events, or to influence the way people act or think in important ways (Cambridge English Dictionary Online). As an age-old concept, Arts and Van Tatenhove argued that it has somehow lost its appeal, hence the effort to rediscover its relevance in contemporary textual analysis (2005). As such, presented as a conceptual framework, it implies a contemporary understanding of power itself as it has evolved from a unitary model through multi-dimensional (Lukes, 1974), contextual (Scholl, et al, 2015), and multi-relational and diffuse (Foucault, 1980), for example.

A critical examination of the *fa’aSamoa* through which political power or, more directly its agents thrive daily, is a delicate task. First, because these agents present themselves as tangible or abstract or both. Their depictions nevertheless are critical to an in-depth analysis of the nature and development of the power concept to explore where it positions itself today in Samoa’s power narrative. As core concepts, they underpin Samoa’s indigenous reference on power relations (Tui Atua, 2018; Meleisea, 1987a). Hence, a better

¹Tavita, L. (2021), *The dilemma of power relations in Samoa. A study of cultural hegemony in a developing democracy*, University of Canterbury).

²Critical traditions as such which can be traced to the Frankfurt School, or generally applied to like-minded critiques.

understanding of these concepts will unlock the door to Samoa's power relations dynamics. Summed herein, they represent the basic consensus of opinion and critique, and are by no means definitive. The reader will be free to complement these with their own views, in the light of other perspectives or own robust analyses.

In line with my hypothesis, I introduce *va* as the central axis of power relations within the Samoan cultural praxis. From here, an attempt is made to clarify its centrality in relation to other concepts of note in the power relations spectrum. I will refer to these other concepts as 'agents' in this discussion. As will be noted, these 'agents' of *va* are interwoven into the discussion and thereby extend the argument.

Initially, the *va* concept, is one of the most discussed in Samoan-based research where human relations are involved (Tavita, 2021). Literally referred to the space between two people or groups of people, is not just space but a relational zone of negotiations in human affinity; and which is sanctioned by the culture. Its upkeep is essential for harmonious relationships and the perpetuation of strong peaceful communities (Anae, 2010, 1987; Tui Atua, 2010; Wendt, 1996). *Va* and *tapu* have a symbiotic relationship due to the common consensus that *va* is sacred; hence *va tapuia* described the essential quality of this space (Tui Atua, 2018; Anae, *ibid.*). Local researchers talked about the relational self that is understood in terms of obligations (Tui Atua, 2010; Lui, 2003; Anae, 1998). As such *teu le va* (Anae, 2010), which literally means, tending to the relations, is a direct appeal to its application as a custom. Tui Atua believes that 'va' tending or *tausi le va* is the essence of the *fa'a Samoa* (2010). Tending to the relations is a way of living, a mindset, a cultural awareness of a people, and a moral obligation (Tui Atua, 2018; Anae, 2010, Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2006). Thus, *va* is 'diffuse and pervasive' as is well encapsulated in Le Tagaloa's definition: "Va is relationship, connection, affiliation, boundaries, difference, separation, space, distance, responsibility, obligation, state of being, position, standing and so much more." (Tagaloa in Mulitalo-Cheung, 2009: 3).

Ideologically, *va* is sanctioned by *tapu* and *mana*, and ritualised through *aga fealoaloa'i*,³ a customary system of deference with a set of norms and a code of practice. Underscored by the principal values of *feavata'i* (mutual honouring of each other) and *fa'ataualofa* (mutual reciprocity), it is both an individual and a collective effort; the Samoan children are instructed very early in life about the protocols of *aga fealoaloa'i* or *fa'aaloalo*⁴ (Tanielu, 2004; Su'aalii-Sauni, 2007). As a family unit all members are morally obligated to its upkeep, first, among own members; secondly, with respect to others in the group and the world outside. As a code of practice, *faiva o fa'aaloalo* or practice of deference serves the interests of 'va tending' within a community and outside of it (*ibid.*). It reinforces essential values such as family loyalty, the sharing of resources and collective responsibility (Anae, 2020; Su'aalii-Sauni, 2007).

To better analyse the situation of power in the relational space, we focus on its roots, first, in the unit of *aiga* (family). *Aiga* is the elementary family; it is the extended family as well. It means lineage, kin, home, someone's spouse, being related, village, and the community at large; Samoa is family through genealogy (Tui Atua, 2010), or in any other context or space where they congregate or acquire or seek fellowship. Hence church is considered as the modern 'village' family particularly for the Samoan diaspora (Sila, 2012). Historically, genealogical ties to Pacific neighbours for economic and political interests were due in part to early mobility, which continues today with a new understanding of families as transcultural, transnational or globally connected (Va'a, 2001; Anae, 2020).

³ Short form *aga fealoa'i*

⁴ *Fa'aaloalo* as both verb and noun are rooted from *alo*, to face toward another person indicating respect. *fealoaloa'i* is a frequentative verb denoting mutual reciprocity between two individuals: a conjoint noun when paired with *aga* (custom) or *tu* (tradition). As a noun, *fa'aaloalo* can stand on its own.

Politically, traditional Samoa is composed of large families (*aiga o tupu – families of nobles; aiga o papa - families of paramount titles*) (Meleisea, 1987; Soo, 2008). These are located in clusters of villages or sub-districts in which the political bases revolved around an original founder or title of high rank. There are nine such families (So’o, 2008) and throughout Samoan history they held the balance of power, either each their own terms or through alliances. Orbiting around their high chief of preference, these traditional power groups while highly impacting in their days, no longer determine the fate of modern Samoan politics, although they continue to cast their tall shadows on modern power relations ideologically at least (Soo, 2008).

Genealogy is core to matai oratory and *fa’aSamoa* repertoire, and the reinforcement of this sense of belonging to the whole, on behalf of family, village, district or a representative is palpable (Kramer, 1994; Turner, 1884; Meleisea, 1987a). A strong sense of belonging to one of these large families, or the two paramount titles⁵ by which most of the western Samoa islands are connected genealogically, is intrinsic to every Samoan born and bred in the homeland. Simply stated, this is a person’s cultural identity through their village genealogy (Meleisea, 1987a).

Kinship relations therefore are threads that hold and pull *fa’aSamoa*’s cultural-genealogical networks and socio-political connections together through the language. The Samoan term for kinship relations is *fāiā*, which literally means, a log used as a bridge over a stream that links two sides (Milner, 1966); and it is a key concept when it comes to gauging the significance of cultural relationships in the *fa’aSamoa*. How a person relates to his/her cultural environment very much defines his/her role as an individual of multiple relations or as a member of a collective of one’s own multiple relations. Through kin a person is an identity of relations (Anae, 2010). How someone is related to another as kin is binding to the *fa’aSamoa* in terms of claims or obligations at every level. These designated relations have been the hallmarks of the *fa’aSamoa*, embedded into the psyche, and they have become definitive aspects of its organisational ethos and good living (Tui Atua, 2018). Kinship relations for Samoa are taken seriously, described by Participant 6 as a sensory umbilical cord by which traditional born and bred Samoans see themselves connected to others or to the world, as an identity or agent for its sake.

Kinship relations lie at the very heart of traditional Samoan politics (Meleisea, 1987a). In the past, special claims were made in times of war and hostility when alliances were needed. Rallying to the aid of a kin in times of need is a moral obligation. Today, whether lending support to his or her political campaign or contributing to a family funeral, the levels of commitment and expectation are the same. It is an honour for both parties. Honour is enhanced even more when you formally acknowledge your genealogical connections through appropriate protocols of traditional identification. Such cultural protocols reinforce bonding and identification of self in relations, no matter what level of social interaction that entails (Anae, 2010). Other synonyms of *fāiā* are *so’otaga* (linkage), *pi’itaga* (cleavage), and *auala* (right of access) (Tui Atua, 2018). They are associated with *fa’asinomaga* (cultural designation), as individuals or members of a group. For example, part of a person’s *fa’asinomaga* obligates him/her morally to help out when a kin is in need; for example, his/her right of access to a funeral *tapu* is through his/her genealogical link, and claims to kinship connections.

The relational space is *tapu*. *Tapu* is a common term among the Pacific languages in their various socio-political contexts (Mills, 2016), from which the English *taboo* was adopted as something to be set aside as sacred or prohibited as to be left untouched. Literature refers to *tapu* as a sacred essence that underpins man’s relations with all things,

⁵Sa Tupuā & Sa Malietoā

with the gods, the cosmos, environment, other men and self (Tui Atua, 2018). The verb form *tapui* means to sanction by means of prohibiting access to something as opposed to the ordinariness of acquiring or taking things for granted. The term *va tapuia* means space that is claimed as sacred and must be treated as such. There is a sense of reverence and cautiousness when treating things that are set apart as sacred or forbidden. Such an attitude is meant to govern every aspect of human relation to human, to God, spirits, other animals, the natural environment in all their diversity and complexity. The underlying supposition is, all relations are *tapu*, at both their macro and micro levels and dimensions. Tagaloa the creator, for who he is in essence, and capacity, is *tapu*; and this sets him apart, as well as define his relationships with his creation (Tui Atua, 2018; Stair, 1897).

As a relation, the person is *tapu*. Their bodies are *tapu*, their families, their belongings, their statuses in society, their titles, food and animals for example. The higher the status the more reserved the *tapu* pertaining to the person. The sacred space (*va tapuia*) implies a sense of caring for and maintaining such a relationship by one's own code of ethics and praxis. Tending to the *va* (relational space) is a moral obligation that directs each and every relation according to custom. The relationship between man and God is *tapu*, so as man with woman, *matai* and *tautua*, human and nature, human and animal, and so forth. From the above, it is evident that the employment of *tapu* as ideological tools for political control has long existed in the pre-European Pacific. First, the idea of a leader as *tapu* is very much ingrained in the Polynesian-Pacific psyche. The human genealogy is traced back to the chief progenitor, Tagaloa, thus legitimizing a person's claim to a higher relationship (Tcherkezoff, 2000). A leader is declared *tapu* (sacred, dignified) on the basis of such higher claims of structured regulatory relations (Mills, 2016; Foucault, 1988).

Second, the way *tapu* has evolved conceptually and practically through human history has often been to support a status quo in power relations (Mills, 2016; Rigo, 2016). Such status quo usually favours the ruling regime. Today *tapu* still connotes traditional religious significance of the past while catering to secular tendencies of the present ((Mills, 2016; Rigo, 2016). This pertains, for example, to the fact that the human body was regulated for political and economic goals, so naturally food and sex were the means to achieving those ends. The human body is still the object of modern state preoccupation. In this sense, such *tapu* systems are now reconstituted through state legislation or any such regulatory means of control. And in these activities the dual role of *tapu* is realized, first, by declaring something as sacred or using such modern terms as normalization, and second, through prohibition or political control (Foucault, 1992). Interestingly, Foucault writes about the phenomenon of biopolitics or its dual role; that is to conserve life as well as discipline life for the sake of political control, which the Pacific peoples have been practising through *tapu* for many generations.

The two concepts, *tapu* and *mana* concur and harmonise. Like *pule*, the concept of *mana* cannot be reduced to a single equivalent in the English language, nor can it be described in a sentence or two. To begin with, *mana* belongs to all the Pacific, as much as *moana* (sea) that envelops Oceania and continues to nourish its indigenous beliefs (Blust, 2009), an elemental foundation of its peoples' worldviews, a spiritual quality with a supernatural origin, a sacred, impersonal force. Blust (2007) contends that *mana* implies an association of meanings pertaining to human power, influence, prestige, authority, demeanour, and efficacy. It refers to the ability to lead or command, or to perform a task in a given situation; the aura that surrounds such a competent performer are outward manifestations of *mana* (Blust, 2009 The quality of *mana* is not limited to humans; animals, places, inanimate objects may also possess mana, and accorded respect as much as ideologies attached to (Tui Atua, 2018; Stair, 1897). *Mana* (quality, energy, power, force) also has a dual appeal in that it presupposed its source as the people's own forbears whose

aitu are still with them, implying such unbroken link with the past ancestral gods (Tui Atua, 2001; Stair 1897).

With the consolidation of Christianity, *mana* has become widely accepted as sourced directly from the Christian God (Kamu, 1989). The missionaries successfully supplanted and recontextualised such a notion by means of the language, both written and spoken, that found its way into the public discourse or the common folk narrative (Kamu, 1989). Today it can be argued that the Samoan Christian church holds the monopoly on the use and interpretation of the idea of *mana*. The pastor, in his capacity as the new *feagaiga* and a member of the village community has become the spiritual head of the polity (Setefano, 2018). Presumably, he has *mana* imbued from both below and above in his role as God's spokesperson (*tulafale*) and intermediary for the people. Otherwise, the *matai* cohort, whose strong presence in the church hierarchy has enabled their rights of access to the *mana* by being active members of their church communities, hence also legitimizing their claim to this godly power.

At the heart of *teu le va* social practice is the principle of *fa'ataualofa*. While *teu le va* is about creating cultural awareness, *fa'ataualofa* is the moral ethos. Premised on the value of love, or the ethic of reciprocating a kind act, it is the pulse of the culture in word and action. To trade kindness for kindness is a universal moral guide to good living which Samoans have internalized and institutionalized through the *matai* system and *fa'a Samoa*. Contributing to a neighbour's *fa'alavelave* has become a rational response for the fact that he/she had previously lent a hand to my own. As noted earlier, when performed with moderation, it is an empowering principle. Its abuse today is regretful; while considered a social capital, and along with Samoa's wealth of cultural capital, *faalavelave* are employed in a way that only reinforces the symbolic control of power on families, to the extent that this paper has pointed out in the latter part by way of example. Thus, upholding family honour usually comes at a cost.

The Samoan term for governance is *pule*. As a pivotal aspect of *va* tending in the Samoan context, it is highly nuanced. Pratt (1893) equates *pule* with the English concepts of authority, order, or command; a synonym *aiā* is defined 'to have authority over.' More recently, another lexicographer, Milner (1966), made eight entries in reference to its noun usage. These are described mostly in terms of its application and general understanding (such as *pule* as a modern corporate manager or a traditional village chief, and the exercise of one's influence over others under a chain of command). Such understanding relates to the moral, mental and physical capacity, or ability of a person to exercise power or to assert it in a particular situation or context. *Pule*, when exercised fairly and mildly, is then perceived from a moral stance of wisdom, clemency, fair judgement, or good governance (Tui Atua, 2013).

Authority rests with the leadership, of which the *ariki* institution was a component in nearly all Polynesian societies (Rigo, 2016). While authority is shared among the rank and file, it is the chief (*alii, ariki, eiki, aiki, akariki, aliki*) whose special powers set him apart from the rest (*tapu*). He has *mana* through which he controls his subjects and environment. His authority is considered sacred due to the nature of his claim to leadership, or for that which the followers had perceived by means of a group or national ideology (Tominiko, 2014, Tcherkezoff, 2000). A new order, in Protestant Christianity, was imposed in terms of society's own forms of interpretive paradigms. From then on, the source of power and legitimacy was no longer derived from indigenous gods or from nature but shifted to one universal god, the Christian God (Kamu, 1989; Tuisugaletau, 2011).

With the emergence of the modern state, Samoa being the first Pacific country to regain independence, legitimate *pule* has, by the people's consensus, been reconceptualized to align more with the democratic state authority (Meleisea, 1987). The state is the modern

ariki and agent of legitimate power, enabled by the new institutions of democracy and Christianity. *Pule* then has refashioned itself like a modern man. A man of two worlds. While adhering to the rule of law in the Weberian sense, he is as much a traditional man and charismatic, all at once. His power base is the village polity, wherein temporal power is still defined, recreated, and maintained (Va'ai, 1999). So, while the state wields its *pule* visibly, its legitimate basis is still in the sphere of the *fa'amatai* and its own ideology, and in the village where symbolic power relations are nurtured and keenly felt (Vaai, 1999). Ecclesiastical *pule* on the other hand draws its *mana* and *pule* also from traditional ideology, plus a literary force, the Bible. The latter's authority made up for the church *pule's* own limitations by its sectarian tendencies and denominational differences. The modern state goes further, by asserting authority on behalf of all its citizens, regardless of the people's religious affiliations. Samoa's constitution acknowledged God as the foundation of its establishment. Meleisea (1987) contended that both church and state exercise *pule* on the strength of three ideological pillars: Christian dogma, indigenous beliefs, and liberal democracy. Each claim on traditional *pule* therefore bears the indulgences of the past in terms of these ideological underpinnings (Meleisea, 1987).

The fact that churches have chosen the village polity as their bases for mission has resulted in a new configuration of *pule* which share the same space (Samuelu, 1999; Tuiai, 2012; Tavita, 2021). Ecclesiastical authority is autonomous in villages, their officers operate independently under the auspices of their national church organisations. Each church denomination freely exercises its own *pule* in tandem with the village authority. Harmonious co-existence of the two *pule* is the goal and rationale that reinforces the maintenance and sustenance of the *va*. The institutional church through its denominations, has become a national 'village' council in its own right, a symbolic power bloc of the new order. As organisations of parallel structures and functions, they are a fusion of democracy, modernity and *fa'aSamoa* all at once (Meleisea, 1987).

Diffusion as such led to political accommodation. As referred to earlier, the Samoan indigenous view of power puts religion in the centre of the political sphere; hence from a religious stance, temporal power is inseparable from the realm of the supernatural. Such a view lends legitimacy to the concepts of *tapu* and *mana* and their influence on those who acquire them. The progenitor god Tangaroa and a host of heavenly deities were the main benefactors of the *mana*, while the recipients were their earthly peers, in the form of *ariki* or earthly deities, and for the Samoans, the matai figure, endowed with *mana*, reinforced by *tapu* institutions (Tcherkezoff, 2000). Apart from a few who were assumed to have been graced with more *mana*, the rest of the cohort were wielders of both temporal and sacred powers, in their capacity as leaders-priests on behalf of their earthly families and communities. The early English missionaries attested to the religious state of the Samoans as highly observant of their gods, the meaningful relationships of which, for instance, fared well in each of their own ways, for the bestowing of favours, thus making headways in getting to know each other's intentions (Turner, 1884; Ta'ase, 1995).

On its own, the success of institutionalized Christianity was in the political usurpation of the Tagaloa religion and family *tapua'iga* in the battle of ideologies; leading to an even more accomplishing feat, a total reset of society, politically and socially (Meleisea, 1987; Wendt, 1996; Tui Atua, 2007a; Maliko, 2012). With the inception of the *faiife'au* institution, a new paradigm shift in power relations ensued, with new *mana* and *tapu* to substitute for the old ones (Taule'ale'ausumai, 2018). The new arrangement aligned with the inauguration of a new kind of political system, a British parliamentary style democracy; a new political religious model which has the king (governor) at the top; subordinated by the clerics on behalf of the church; and by the executive and parliament on behalf of the state, and finally the people making up a civil society (Meleisea, 1987).

As head of both church and state the king/queen savours both secular and sacred powers at once. The new Samoan political order has the ceremonial head at the top, the bearer is a representative symbol of unity of religion (church), and secular authority (state). The clerics (*faiife'au*) lead the church, and the *matai* lead the state. Both authorities were meant to serve the same purpose of unity under a shared religious dogma. Both authorities were endowed with such *mana* to rule, and by virtue of their shared dualistic heritage, under the auspices of the *faaSamoa*. As parts of one organism (society) or design, both were inclined naturally to cooperate in a mutually inclusive relationship.

The traditional European view of power as unilateral has been a sticking point in the relationship between the Samoan subjects and their colonial masters (Meleisea, 1987; So'o, 2008). The latter, who hailed from a background of historical feudalism and a monarchical tradition, wherein vertical power structure was the norm, found Samoa's own approach quite a different proposition (Meleisea, 1987). This approach favours consensus, *matai* style. Called *soalaupule*, it has been the mainstay of Samoa's politics for generations. The tension therefore between two worldviews was inevitable. Research agreed that both the German and New Zealand administrations had failed for the fact that they ignored the way power relations worked for their Samoan subjects (Meleisea, 1987).

For the Samoans, *soalaupule* is a principle of power dealing based on mutual consensus among its stakeholders. Samoa's ontology of power and view of leadership is holistic, it is a collective undertaking, a process of mutual interests, an egalitarian exercise in decision making that defers to the goodwill of all parties involved (So'o, 2008; Tcherkezoff, 2000). In contrast to democracy, it is not a rule of the majority. This is better understood in the way politics of *va* tending are played out at the grassroots level, or the village polity. A typical village council is made up of two major ruling cohorts, *tamalii* ceremonial chiefs (consisting of titular *tapa'au*, *aiga* and a lesser ranking cohort) and *tulafale* or orators (consisting of titular *tulafale* and an entourage of lesser ranking cohort), who by mutual deference conduct village business within the parameters of their respective roles assigned by custom (see Tavita, 2021 for a full analysis).

To further understand power relations in the Samoan political context, one needs to look closely into the ideological ethos of the *fa'amatai*, or the *pule-tautua* principle (Tominiko, 2014; Tui Atua, 2018). Defined earlier, *pule* stands for authority and power that is embodied in the person of a *matai* whose power is manifested at all three levels of popular political organisation/activities—family meeting, village *fono*, and national assembly. Old Samoan cosmology is pantheistic and supports the belief in the divinity of human and sanctity of its leaders. Tagaloa the supreme god and progenitor of life is also human; both earth and sky are his dominions; thus, his sphere of influence on human affairs is personal and encompassing. While the gods in heaven rule over the spiritual realm (*atua o le lagi*), *matai* are gods and rulers of the earthly realm (*atua o le lalolagi*) (Tcherkezoff, 2000; Stair, 1897). The gods are personified in the leadership, in the first ancestral *matai*, the first title bearer whose authority rests on such divine designation. This idea of ancestors as gods; their names (titles) and power perpetuated through their offsprings from one generation to another, has endured (Turner, 1884; Tui Atua, 2018).

The term *tautua* is both verb and noun. To serve those in authority is definitive of the *va* tending rationale of the *fa'aSamoa*. Serving the *matai* (authority) lies at the heart of such activity, the purpose and outcome of which are political. As the way to authority is through service, it also supports the church's Calvinistic work ethic and its persistence in advocating the values of hard work (Tuiai, 2012; Garrett, 1982). Such a work ethic was part of the missionaries' narrative; a concept in theology, sociology, economics, and history that put stress on service, discipline, and frugality as evidence of a person's subscription to the values espoused by the Protestant faith (Garrett, 1982; Lovett, 1899). While the Calvinistic

work ethic supports capitalism and individualism, the values that it espoused do complement Samoa's concept of *pule-tautua* for its end results (Tui'ai, 2012). Hard work deserves a reward. As such, the concept of *tautua* is always conjoined with *pule*.

The meaning of *tautua* has changed markedly over the past 50 years (Tupua, 2001). This is due to a range of factors including transmigration, modern mobility, globalization, corporate capitalism and the technological nature of serving (Anae, 2020; Va'a, 2001; Toleafoa, 2007; Tui Atua, 2001). While in the past the *pule-tautua* (aka *matai-tautua*) paradigm denotes a unique sense of power relations that is empowering, orderly and egalitarian (Laal'ai-Tausa, 2020; Tcherkezoff, 2009), today this has served the interests of power politics, capitalism and human greed (Toleafoa, 2007; Thornton et al., 2010, Tui Atua, 2014). Thus, the sweeping changes in the systems, brought about by the dictates of globalisation and money on the relationship, have contributed to this seismic shift in *va* tending in a very dynamic way. For example, on one hand, the proliferation of *matai* titles intergenerationally has undermined the *tapu* of *tautua tuavae* (Tui Atua, 2014). On the other hand, *tautua 'aitaumalele* has become more popular with Samoans residing overseas. They continue to serve their *matai* through remittances and other means of service (Anae, 2020; Chan Mow, 2007). Such modern ways of doing *tautua* have redefined the dynamics of power relations, the implications of which for Samoan traditions and modern institutions, have been acutely felt one way or another (Tavita, 2021; Soo, 2007).

A number of studies have delved into the intricacies of the concept from a wide range of perspectives (Tofaono, 1998; Nofoa'iga, 2017; Tominiko, 2014, Tui Atua, 2018). For example, it has been appropriated by the church to suit its own reading of the biblical notion of service or discipleship. *Tautua lotu* has become an integral part of the main menu of the church discourse. Because God loved humankind, in return, serving God is the ultimate goal and purpose of living, hence service by means of tending to the needs of the church is deemed the most appropriate form of human response.

The fusion between the old and the new—the mortal *matai* professed by the new religion and the divine *alii* of pre-contact Samoa still promoted in *matai* propaganda, is hardly an issue of contention. Since the ascendancy of the Bible, the printed word has prevailed in terms of supplanting the 'old word' that once stood to represent the old tradition, including Tagaloa religion. In favour of the new is understood by the fact that today's church is another stronghold of *matai* leadership; anything that promotes their interests is worth defending (Garrett, 1982; Tuimalealiifano, 2006). The Bible has become the single most powerful affirming truth for those in power to defend the legitimacy of their ascendancy to important roles. Its text freely drawn upon by both secular and religious orators to enhance their own art. Hence ideology in a new morphing continues to be a powerful underpinning force for *fa'amatai* because it is entrenched in the language (Tavita, 2021).

It is also in the *va* that a person can claim his/her cultural inheritance. The Samoan term *fa'asinomaga* generally refers to such a claim. From the verb *fa'asino* (to point to, to direct towards), it has a plural meaning. First, it alludes to a moral direction, a pointing out of the way. Second, it alludes to a fixed designation, a cultural affirmation of belonging, and therefore a rightful claim to family and its capital. This leads to the third, that is, a sense of obligation to protecting family entitlements such as titles, genealogy, lands, and even people. This comprises reputation in terms of the cultural roles or specialized skills and trades that are passed on intergenerationally within a family line (Tui Atua, 2018).

A person is directed to his/her cultural designation through socialization within the family unit, the village, and the wider society (Bourdieu, 1999; Aukuso, 2021). In this process, individual identity is nurtured and established. Through relationship tending, group identities are nurtured, normalized and perpetuated.

Finally, language defines the relational space (*va*) and perpetuates a society's *status quo* (Bourdieu, 1999, 1989). Symbolic power invests in words that are meant to uphold the relational space (*va*) as sacrosanct, more so the *tapu* of those who matter most in the hierarchical arrangement. Such investment through the language perpetuates the claims to cultural and social capital, making knowledge acquisition a favoured priority of society (Foucault, 1988). Hence knowledge is power through the language (Foucault, 1988.) and accepted as truth by society or all parties involved (Foucault, 1988). For example, the concept of *fa'alupega* is a Samoan way of profiling the who's who of leadership and places (see Meleisea, 1987a). Its demonstration as an art can only consolidate the *status quo* or the cultural intent behind the protocol (Bourdieu, 1999). In sum, language serves the interests of the political power hierarchy directly and indirectly through knowledge discourses (Foucault, 1988), and as a social practice, creates 'the structures and forces of social institutions within which we live and function' and being created by such in the process (Fairclough, 1989:vi).

Critical Analysis

Having discussed the intricacies of the *va* as a confluence of complex interests and relations, a fair review of its political implications in the life of the Samoan people and its major institutions can now be offered. In this part of the discussion, the purpose is to ply the tools of critical theory and the views of three power analysts, to validate the central argument that the *va* concept is core to understanding Samoa's power relations. This assertion will be verified in part, or collectively in the context of the three political spheres of influence – the state, the civil and traditional authorities. The approach to this part of the discussion is discursive and holistic; any point of evidence or argument is by no means definitive.

To reiterate, the role of critical theory is underscored by a common sceptical view of the political status quo. As a theory for political action, it "seeks to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them" (Horkheimer, 1982: 244). Primarily critical Theory (CDA) maintains that ideology is the principal obstacle to human emancipation, and this theoretical stance is focused on language, symbolism, social construction, and communication. Due to the role of language in concealing power relations, the task of CDA is to uncloak these hidden power relations, constructed through language, and to demonstrate and challenge social inequities reinforced and reproduced (McGregor, 2003). As evident in the above overview, the power of a system lies in the unconscious acceptance of values, traditions, cultures, and institutional structures of a society (Bourdieu, 1986; Hardy, 2001). Hardy described this form of power as an inherent aspect of organisational life, reproduced by day-to-day communicative practices (Hardy, 2001).

Deetz and Mumby maintained that organizational reality is characterized less by the domination of one group over another, than by complex discursive practices that "define what it means to be an organizational member and allow for the privileging of managerial interests over others" (1990: 32, 39). Because of the strong kinship relations and bonding in traditional Samoan structures, and collective identity for example, such practices and discourses are sustained (Meleisea, 1987; Soo, 1987; Vaai, 1999; Vaa, 2001; Anae, 2020). It follows then, that a culture that is built on the strength of such unassailable ideology can always be taken for granted. Following Hardy's argument, the *va*, as maintained by *mana*, *tapu* and *tua'oi*, has provided the ideological underpinnings for a society to frame discursive and non-discursive practices that make sense for them (Hardy, 2001). Power then is viewed in terms of a collective identity, a network of power relations in which everyone plays a part. Because power is diffuse (Foucault, 1984), the relationship between *pule* and *tautua* is symbiotic, a socio-political obligation, affirmed by yesterday's

morals and values of kinship, and upheld and sanctioned by the system's own truths (Weber, 1999). Such power is hard to escape from (Hardy, 2001). And because legitimation of power relations is hinged upon a very powerful ideology (known to a group as a way of living), there is little room for critical reflection (Hardy, 2001; Freire, 1970).

To understand why there is such unwavering commitment by the ordinary Samoans to their culture, we might seek the answer in Samoa's political ideology. Literature refers to the notion of a 'third face of power', or 'the invisible power,' which Heywood (1994) described as the pervasive power of ideology, values and beliefs in reproducing class relations and concealing contradictions (1994). Cultural hegemony according to Gramsci (1988), is not about subjugation or domination in the old sense; rather it is power domination in a subtle form, in ways by which authority maintains power by having others give their consent. While domination denotes absolute control, hegemony on the other hand appeals to the effect of influence, patronage, or leadership (Kendie, 2006). Unlike reward power, which is the opposite of coercive power, cultural hegemony, is about a mental disposition in the realm of ideas and knowledge, that is, in most cases, devoid of 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 1970). Hence the crucial role of ideology in maintaining the political status quo.

Bourdieu's theory of capital lends a critical perspective to the efficacy of Samoan kinship relations as a political force in power reinforcement. Constituted in three forms, these are 1. Economic capital 2. Social capital, and 3. Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital refers to material assets that are "immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights" (Bourdieu 1986: 247). Bourdieu defined social capital as, "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu 1986: 247); a network-based resource that is available in interpersonal relationships. Social capital is considered as a collective feature of society (Song, 2013); a conceptual construct based on the idea of the value of social relationships and networks that complement the economic capital for economic growth of an organization (Bhandari and Yasunobu, 2009).

Because Bourdieu's focus is on the group level, such space enables group members to function much more effectively. When relations are well nurtured, capital is amplified which results in solidarity, group cohesion, and empowerment. In his words, many requirements for social life are accessible only "via the virtues of social capital or the relations, obligations, trust and reciprocity inherent in it" (Bourdieu, 1986: 252). As Bourdieu contended, "Such virtues do not occur instantaneously but are products of the investment of both time and energy before and beyond their use. Such acts are not guaranteed, nor are they sealed with legal contractual arrangements and do not appear to have imminent results. Time lag is the key factor that transmutes a simple act of goodwill, a favour from a stranger, a smile, a gift, a greeting into recognition between parties. What was at the time a pure and simple debt becomes across time "the recognition of a non-specific indebtedness" (Bourdieu, 1986: 252, cited in Atkins, 1999). To sum up, Bourdieu gives the label, 'gratitude.'

Social groups which show strong signs of solidarity are the ones who invest more in their social relations. Thus, there is an ongoing demand to invest in social capital (tending to relations, building trust for example) or it will deteriorate (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu stressed the importance of investment of time and energy to the maintenance of social capital, where every member of a group plays a part. The foundation of social capital is investment of time and energy based on a basic premise of trust to allow for recognition, more trust, good faith, and reciprocity to transpire. Such virtues are invested without the expectation of prompt or immediate returns, but an investment strategy for the future or

indeed a response from the past that self-generates as an investment for the future (Bourdieu, 1986). A lack of response or input from other parties, or indeed an abuse of the resource, reduces the levels of social capital between the actors and so self-regulates its own losses. Stocks of social capital not constantly nurtured or invested will deteriorate (Bourdieu, 1986). Tending to relations then seriously implies both social and political investments for all stakeholders. All interact as components of a single organism, persisting as if their survival depends on it (Song, 2013).

Political investment in hierarchy and status then are embedded in the *va* of human affinities as well as by social design (Bourdieu, 1986). Because cultural capital is synonymous with social capital (prestige, honour, recognition, pedigree, etc.) then naturally both are more dominant in determining how hierarchies of power are situated and reproduced across societies. Bourdieu refers to the “‘tacit almost unconscious’ domination of cultural/social modes in the everyday social habits” (1986: 47). He uses the term ‘distinction’ to differentiate social spaces and the power relations that go with these. Belonging to a certain group is evidence of a person’s social distinction or his/her symbolic identity, manifested in lifestyles, tastes, language, decorum and so forth. Politically, symbolic power accounts for the discipline in maintaining places in a social hierarchy (Giddens, 1973).

The effects of symbolic power on social relations can be understood along this line of accepting the status quo without question. Indeed, while everyone has some form of cultural capital, some are more recognizable than others. The more recognizable enjoy such status as opposed to others who are less identifiable. Bourdieu maintained that power relations are misrecognised, by which he meant that society has ‘consecrated’ such relations with or without the knowing of those involved (Bourdieu, 1986). He contended, “Symbolic power is the power to make things with words,” (Bourdieu, 1986: 23). In Samoan *fa’alupega*, deference to those in power reinforces their recognized statuses and thereby ‘consecrate things that are already there’ (Bourdieu, 1986).

Cultural capital refers to the sum of symbolic elements such as skills, credentials, material belongings, aesthetic taste, mannerisms, even posture and attire (Bourdieu, 1986). It comprises a person’s education profile, social status and privileges arisen from. Cultural capital is acquired through socialization to a dominant culture and its higher traditions (Bourdieu, 1986). By a person’s intellectual disposition or common rapport with like-minded individuals (*habitus*) he/she takes on the values, attitudes, or traditions of any such group. For example, mastery of a specialized language, *gagana fa’afailauga*, is a way of enhancing a person’s social status, or more so, of embodying cultural capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Language then is not just a means of communication but a display of power itself that defines people’s statuses in the *va* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). It follows therefore that the maintenance of *va* always takes place within the socio-political sphere, and due to its symbolic tendencies, the stakeholders also have vested interests in a community’s political economy (Kratke and Thomas, 2011).

Gramsci’s own understanding of tending to relations was in terms of practices, politico-ideological discourses and elements pertaining to (Gramsci, 1999). Using the term “terrain” of practices, principles and dogmas having a material and institutional nature, they constitute individual subjects and social agents which are instrumental in spreading own beliefs across the substructure and the ideological superstructure (Gramsci, 1999). In contrast to the Marxist reductionist view about class struggle and each group holding onto own ideas (Ramos, 1980), Gramsci’s interpretation was encompassing; tending to the relational space was the work of all classes and groups. Hence his ideas of organic ideology and organic intellectuals. First, organic ideology, described in terms of the organic arrangement of all ideological elements into a unified system by means of hegemonic rule,

is the work of the organic intellectuals (Gramsci, 1999; Ramos, 1980). Such ideology is the binding force by means of complex arrangements. Among its key features is the ability of its proponents to successfully articulate and express the more essential elements of the ideological discourses pertaining to the subaltern classes.

Organic ideology is diffused throughout civil society by the political consent of all classes and by common virtues of socio-economic relations. This becomes a hegemonic principle of the state or the ruling class, accepted by all as ‘common sense.’ Such common sense pervades and prevails in the works of civil institutions and structures such as family, churches, the media, schools, the legal system, trade unions, public and private associations (Gramsci, 1999). Organic intellectuals are found in all groups and classes, and more directly within the economic structure of their society; compared to traditional intellectuals whose members are mostly identified with civil society (Gramsci, 1988). The latter represent traditions and the past. Due to their specialized skills, knowledge and professional impartiality, both groups are placed favourably within the system, to influence power relations evenly.

In reference to the Samoan *status quo*, organic intellectuals are equated more with the elite groups in the state, the church and civil authority; in contrast with traditional intellectuals in the matai cohort or sub-groups who are identified with the conservative forces of society – religious, cultural, and political (Gramsci, 1988). Gramsci considered the organic intellectuals as more useful in the struggle to achieve a counter-hegemony (Gramsci, 1999). By their own social backgrounds and lived experiences, the presumption is that many of them are more empathetic to the common people, serving as agents for the relaying of subaltern ideals and aspirations into the public discourse. In saying that, any attempt to demarcate clearly between the two is not easy given the diffuse nature of power relations in Samoan society.

At any rate, the contributions of a few in effecting changes at crucial moments in Samoa’s history have mostly been productive, a factor that must be noted. For example, we might look at the political crisis of 2021 when a caretaker government refused to concede defeat as a case in point, when a few individuals stepped up on behalf of democratic principles, irrespective of the risks (Samoa Observer, Issue 25 May, 2021). There was evidence that both the Samoan organic and traditional intellectuals collaborated at this juncture to effect change (Tavita, 2021; Karpova et al., 2016; Gramsci, 1988). Together they underscore as well as drive Samoa’s own counter-hegemony.

Political power according to Foucault (1988) exists only in relations, which for Samoans are derived from personal familial connections to basic groupings defined through kinship, or through common affinities to more complex genealogical/transnational links (Meleisea, 1987; Anae, 2019). Tending to these relations is a political activity of which *va* becomes the point of convergence. As discussed earlier, its promotion comes at the expense of suppressed voices and hidden relations. Because of the situation of power that favours the status quo, its adverse effects are not clearly articulated in Samoa’s own power narrative. Heywood has referred to the pervasive power of ideology, values and beliefs in reproducing class relations and concealing contradictions (1994). At face level, Samoa is readily perceived as one big family, where statuses and roles have been defined and the anticipation is that every member plays his/her part for the family, hence the argument that the political, social and economic disparities are not always matters of urgent priorities in the political discussion (Tavita, 2021).

Tending to the *va* at state level has been the prerogative of modern politics and government. Rather than merely stifle the relations, Samoa’s own multiple systems of governance (*fa’amatai*, democracy, theocracy, elitism, and state bureaucracy) have served the political interests of power where necessary. As instruments of power, the government

has managed to make good use of the choices offered; they are parts and parcels of the system, embedded in a regime of legitimate processes. For example, in a democratic system where at its most useful, it enables the maintenance of bureaucratic institutions and political stability. Contrariwise, it serves as a means to politically engineer a ruling regime perpetuity through the power of majority rule. In *fa'amatai* where, at its best, it supports national development through consensus rule, or at worst, it enforces the will of a few via power instruments of acquiescence (Gaventa, 1982). In a theocracy where a culture-sponsored ideology serves the interests of the church hierarchy; and, in political parties where elite interests are promoted (Tolefoa, 2013; Setefano, 2018; Tavita, 2021).

The unravelling of hidden power relations, in the state's bureaucracy, which became the focus of much public interest, when the electoral crisis emerged soon after the official results of April 2021 were declared, and the fallout that followed (Samoa Observer, Issue 11/6/2021; Issue 27/8/2021), hauled in a new chapter in Samoa's power narrative or even for its own brand of political intersectionality. To illustrate, the Faatuatua i le Atua Samoa ua Tasi (FAST)⁶ government lamented that they've been discriminated against on the basis of gender and capability; the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) leader's inference to an alleged plot involving the New Zealand prime minister to install the first Samoan female counterpart, as well, its deputy leader hinting on the capability of the new government leadership, which is obviously a partisan assessment (The Guardian, 25/8/2021), Samoa Observer, 13/8/2021). The new FAST government believed that it has borne the brunt of this power instrument (Foucault, 1988), honed by the former government for three decades or so. The Samoan state bureaucracy has been implicated directly in the ensuing political crisis, or more precisely, this was the case for a number of those in leading roles, who seemed to have used their power and influence adversely and therefore were politically involved (Samoa Observer, Issue 11/6/2021; EFKS TV⁷). O'Neill (1986) contended that the ultimate task of a punitive bureaucracy is to control the minds and behaviours of the workers. Weber long predicted its potential as a political tool to sabotage democratic institutions (Clegg, 1989).

In terms of the relationship between government and the church, this has never been highlighted as much until the issue of the 'pastors' tax' emerged, when the HRPP government passed legislation for its implementation, notwithstanding the cultural and political risks involved (Tavita, 2021). Noted earlier, the absorption of the Christian mission into the *va* or the space of power negotiation, transformed the dynamics of power relations overnight. Local literature amply testified to the role of a hybrid ideology through the language, by which the church and its role in society were propelled to take centre stage in the *va* (Tavita, 2021). The issue of exemption of church pastors from paying taxes to the state is not confined to Samoa, although traditional *tapu* in support of may be unique to each society. For Samoa, such are professed at the expense of new *tapu*, or the ethos and values of modern governance such as equity and a fair go for all citizens, regardless of their status. Privileging and promoting a message of entitlement have been contested strongly by the majority of participants of a survey on the question, Should pastors pay taxes to the state?⁸ While sixty-five percent argued in favour, the overwhelming ninety-two percent of the younger cohort (21-39 years) couldn't be more agreeable.

Critical Theory (CT) maintains that ideology is the principal obstacle to any political emancipation. Focusing on language, symbolism, communication, and social

⁶ Translated into Samoan, it means, Faith in God as a united Samoa.

⁷ In its popular TV programme 'Soalepule,' the EFKS TV host and new FAST government officials have discussed this openly many times; recorded evidence on UTube for example.

⁸ Eighty participants have been asked of their opinion, using the question, Should pastors pay taxes to the state?

construction, CT argues against any neutral engagement of subject with an objective reality (Linklater, 2007). Because CT has taken the stance that nothing must be taken for granted (Marcano, 2018), it follows that the practice of *teu or tausī le va* has come under intense scrutiny for factors as pointed out already. I will draw freely from the thesis data to elaborate on some of these factors.

First, in political governance and practice, *tausī le va* has become a risky exercise socially, economically, and psychologically, particularly when lending to its materialistic excesses. While there are families who can cope with the pressure, who would risk raising the bar in flaunting wealth for reasons such as family honour, other not so well-off families are compromised (Tuiai, 2012; Thornton, et al, 2010). Many of these families will resort to borrowing to avoid losing face. Family members who live mostly in New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, bear the burden for most of their *aiga* in Samoa, whether in financing a funeral, a wedding, a village building project, or a church offering (Tuiai, 2012; Sila, 2012; Maliko, 2012). These customs and practices are highly implicated in Samoa's social problems and even contribute to poverty among families in both Samoa and overseas (Samoa Observer, Issue June 4, 2019; Families Commission Study, 2011).

Such risks are tied to the intricacies of socio-cultural *tapu* of deference to those having political clout in this interrelation of state-church-*fa'amatai* power confluence, and subsequently the dilemmas of governance as a result (Laalaa-Tausa, 2020; Tavita, 2021). Due to the affective and unconventional nature of *va* tending, it encourages certain malpractices, which in the context of the modern state and principles, are problematic and highly contradictory (Larmour, 2012; Tuimalealiifano, 2020).

Language is an active player in the way people and societies interact through any manner of relationship (McGregor, 2003). That the relationship between the linguistic forms and ideas of reality are binding thus makes language the core part of a wider ideological process (ibid, 2003). Fairclough (2001) contends that CDA provides opportunities to consider the relationships between discourse and society, between text and context, and that between language and power. As a power, Fairclough (1994) argued that it is "implicit within everyday social practices" (p.50). Hence in serving various interests, language validates the status quo ultimately (Fairclough, 2001). CDA looks at the way language is employed and manipulated, to show how ideological presuppositions are hidden underneath the surface structures of language choices in text. Henderson (2005) noted that CDA has offered the researcher an opportunity to question the taken-for-grantedness of language and enabling explorations of how texts represent the world in particular ways according to particular interests.

According to Fairclough (2001), the pertinent questions are: a. How are such interests positioned in the text or speech? b. Whose interest is negated in the relations? c. What are the consequences of such positioning? The role of analysis is to seek to find out such implications in power relations. For an example, the use of language in the validation of matai authority. In the words of a popular traditional song, *Ua tofia e le Atua Samoa ina ia pulea e matai, auā o lona suafa ua vaelua i ai. God has decreed that Samoa be ruled by matai, because he's shared his own name with them* (my translation). Participant 8 quoted this opening verse to reassert the belief that the source of matai authority is God himself. Thus, while the source is the ultimate authority, the validation of the status quo is a foregone conclusion. A simple deconstruction of this verse will take us back to the days of the Tagaloa religion tradition claimed, was the first *matai* himself. It is obvious from this song whose interests are promoted through the lyrics in the context of modern power relations.

Another example further illustrates this point. While officiating at the opening of a new church building, a church leader professed: "*O lenei falesa o le faitoto'a i le malo o le lagi.*" "*This church building is the doorway to heaven.*" Such a persuasive rhetoric

contributes to perpetuating a dominant narrative. Even while pointing to a church building as the doorway to eternal life theologically at least, all connotations that allude to a ‘salvation by works’ ethic have, nonetheless, been subtly propagated. The simple folk may not differentiate between a church door and the gospel (John 14.6, KJV), which the leader did not make any reference to in his address. Tui Atua (2018) has noted the richness of the Samoan language that appeals to allusion, riddles, metaphors of self-effacement and doublespeak. At least two participants in the study referred to the village pastor living in a dilapidated house, *fa’afaletulu’ia*, literally meaning, “be housed in a leaky building.” This is a fine example of Samoan self-effacement and doublespeak. The reality is that village pastors are housed in the best lodgings in most Samoan villages. As noted earlier, the transfer of *feagaiga* status to the *faife’au* set a precedent for a new social order with its own political ideology, expressed through the language (Tavita, 2021). Such an unprecedented act calls for an ambiguous power relation in terms of the role’s unadulterated theological proposition, versus the cultural significance of the *feagaiga* status.⁹

More than half of the participants in the study alluded to Jesus’ ethics and Samoan values as complementary. This has evoked a past theological exchange, wherein local and regional advocates, all vied for recognition of a contextualised gospel message (Lewis, 2004). A popular saying, *E mamalu le lotu ona o le aganuu. The church is held in high repute due to the patronage of culture* (my translation), is part of this repertoire. Where the pastor is held in the highest esteem through the language, for example, *o le suliva’aia o le Atua, the visible heir of God* (Setefano, 2018), *o le ao o fa’alupega, the premier of all salutations* (*ibid.*), no one bothers asking how these texts fare from the stance of the founder’s simple yet uncompromising ethics (Matthew 5). Suffice to say, any culture by which humans can be deified, extolled or some elevated based on class or ideological beliefs, will have problems integrating with a creed of humble brotherhood/sisterhood, and avowed egalitarianism (Galatians 3, KJV).

McGregor (2003) stated that the main role of CDA is to uncloak the hidden power relations, largely constructed through language (McGregor, 2003; Wodak, 2001). In reference to Fairclough (1989), McGregor wrote: “The objective of CDA is to uncover the ideological assumptions that are hidden in the words of our written text or oral speech in order to resist and overcome various forms of power over or to gain an appreciation that we are exercising “power over,” unbeknownst to us” (McGregor, 2018: 1). In that sense, Bourdieu’s claim that power relations are misrecognised (Bourdieu, 1984), hidden (Lukes, 1974), or normalized (Foucault, 1982), are sustained, particularly in a society where social status, family honour, privilege and collective identity are considered far more important priorities (Weber, 1968). The data also came out strongly on the immediate concerns such as the role of money as a power instrument in changing existing power relations and forging new ones. Sixteen participants referred to this concern both directly and indirectly (So’o, 2007; Tuimalealiifano, 2006). Apart from a few, the majority of participants seemed to have taken their relations with *faaSamoa* for granted; at least fifteen strongly expressed their support. The other three did so with some reservation, with two being moderately critical.

⁹ *faife’au* means to serve others, as noun servant, as *feagaiga* he is to be served (cf. Luke 22.25-27).

Conclusion

Tending to the *va* has been the preoccupation of the Samoan people across generations, dictated by powerful forces that are political, economic, social and psychological. Practised within the *fa'aSamoa* cultural framework, the relational space has been the convergent point on which power is concentrated, recreated, negotiated, and redistributed daily (Tavita, 2021). I've argued that such interface is the ultimate point of reference when studying and analysing Samoa's power relations seriously.

As evident in the discussion, the power of a system lies in the unconscious acceptance of values, traditions, cultures and structures of an institution or society (Bourdieu, 1986; Hardy, 2001). Gramsci maintained that the hegemony of a system is not so much its coercive appeal, but the subtle form of control by which it manifests itself through systems of ideology, encased in the language, and accepted as common sense by both the governors and governed (1999). A new worldview is an extension of the old, a matter of rearticulating or disarticulating narratives wherever it suits the status quo of the day. This is well demonstrated in the evolution and development of the power concept from pre-contact Samoa's traditional village rule to the present day's own hybrid models of authority. The gradual development of the *feagaiga* institution, the consummation of which is a reset of modern power relations, is a fitting example (Tavita, 2021).

In summing up, I began this paper with the supposition that any contemporary analysis of power and power relations in Samoa will have to familiarize itself first with the *va* concept. The argument is, *va* is the space upon, and through which political power and its agents thrive daily. The *va* concept was defined generally in terms of the socio-political dimensions in the power parameters of *fa'aSamoa*. The literature, and data collected from the survey have all affirmed that *va* is where power is situated, propagated, and executed on a daily basis. The findings from this study have verified the claim that no matter the facade, the old and the new order coexist ideologically, and thus are tied together politically as one entity, if not harmoniously, together (Laalaai-Tausa, 2020; Tavita, 2021). Such a dilemma is explained by the fact that every society has its own systems and networks of generating and maintaining power relations that make sense for them as a people or group. The critical unpacking in this paper has helped to explain the forces behind the dilemma of power relations in the Samoan context, particularly where multiple systems are involved (Fairclough, 1998; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008).

Thus, it can be concluded that any serious observation of Samoa's power relations can only be validated through the acknowledgement of *va* as the leverage system in Samoa's pluralist politics and governance; and that *va* has the sole duty in this important task of making sense on behalf of not just a few but all sectors of society. The task of 'making sense' of any political dilemma, or in more plain terms 'make do with the best of what we have,' is an appeal for balance, moderation and visionary leadership (Tui Atua, 2018). To shun *tapu*, or miscalculate a delicate situation has proven perilous, time and again, as the 2021 election crisis would also attest to strongly.

Because Samoan society has forged its power relations within the confines of own unique system of cultural hegemony, both the benefits and the risks in the task of leveraging are inherent, as they are political. Notwithstanding the risks, the overall feeling shared among the study's participants, and proponents of Samoa's unique system, is that the emancipatory qualities of *va* would need to be promoted ahead of its flaws diligently, informed by the best insights of time, when power (knowledge) employs itself productively to maintain the best consensus possible.

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Acknowledgement:

Distinguished Professor Steven Ratuva

Dr Christina La'ala'ai-Tausa

Dr Michael Davis