

## Chapter 10

### FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

In this chapter I present the findings. I wish to begin with the three prime findings.

1. That there is ample evidence of a strong correlation between literature and the data results in support of the hegemonic influence of the culture in Samoa's power relations.
2. The data results revealed the decisive role of the political will, in association with culture through its institutions, in facilitating the processes of assimilation, normalization and rationalization of democracy and all other systems introduced into society.
3. The third is the state of political inertia, brought forth because of the tussle between progressive and conservative forces of society. Such inertia is emblematic of the reality of the power relations dilemma, which critical theory has traced to a well-managed regime of subtle control. Both cultural and state *tapu* have been successful in producing docile bodies and minds, hence a tacit acceptance of the status quo (Foucault, 1991).

The three findings basically sum up the outcome results of the research. Herewith is an elaboration in total with the purpose to evoke further discussions.

#### 10.1 Summary of findings and discussion

1. The study has reaffirmed previous research of the prevailing influence of the culture on the whole base and superstructure of the Samoan society. Using a Marxist notion of society to explain, the term *aganuu* stands to represent the base, by which the concept is an incorporation of many relations: capital in various forms: cultural, economic, ideological, technological. The superstructure comprises the cultural institutions alongside civil society and the state's own. As summed up in Analysis 1, the point of difference lies in Samoa's own emphasis on social and cultural capital as ideological underpinnings of *faaSamoa*. I stated, "A culture that is built on the strength of human relationships and institutions arisen from is almost unassailable." A culture which power relations are hierarchical and fixed is very much taken for granted (Bourdieu, 1986), especially in a society where social status, family honour, privilege and collective identity are considered far more important priorities (Weber, 1968). As such, all cultural

institutions stand to uphold the supremacy of *faamatai* in authority legitimation whether it is in the family, the village, the church, country, including the state. There is little to differentiate between the state and civil authority in this respect, nor any marked boundary between the base and superstructure. This is hard evidence in support of the influence of traditional culture on all spheres of the Samoan society (Le Tagaloa, 1996; Tofaeono, 1999; Simanu, 2002).

2. Literature attests to the predominant role of the *faamatai* in society as impacting and deeply embedded in the Samoan psyche (Le Tagaloa, 1992). The figure of the matai as ‘the sole authority’ is reproduced at all levels of the power hierarchy. While the practices pertaining to may have changed, the belief system remains intact however. The *faamatai* still provides the moral tenets for all types of secular authorities; the binding force that pulls society together. This includes the state, even the church. Such domination through assimilation and enculturation can be explained. While the state may seem like a new matai in the house (authority), he is in fact the same guy in his other title. The state hauls in a new worldview of all classes unified in a new hegemonic script, under a new form of constitution, though in essence it is an extension of the old worldview. Gramsci used the term cultural hegemony.

A transformation though not a complete replacement (Ramos, 1980). Agreeing with Bourdieu (1979) and Weber (1968) on the culture’s predominance over economic relations, Gramsci viewed ideology as a key tool, a binding force of society by means of complex arrangement (Ramos, 1980). This can even be used to advance the cause of the subaltern groups. The successful incorporation of the state into the superstructure consolidated the unbroken link of past and present.

In the founding of the Samoan state there was no complete replacement of the previously dominant worldview (traditional ideology comprising of *matai*, *mana*, *tapu*, *va*, etc.). Rather, a modern worldview was refashioned out of these existing ideological elements, also championed by the subaltern groups in their discourses (Ramos, 1980). These were accepted as ‘common sense’ values of the new state (Gramsci & Forgas, 1999). Thus the concepts of *tulafono*, *mana*, *tapu*, *pule* were retained for their flavour, like the proverbial old wine repackaged in new skins. As new *tapu* these were

may not see it too because they are devoid of critical consciousness. The concept critical consciousness as proposed by Paulo Freire (1970) describes the ability to recognize and analyse systems of inequality, more so, the commitment to take action against. The implications as Freire put forward powerfully is that, a system that is devoid of critical consciousness must not escape scrutiny. People can be empowered to reflect critically on their situation through education (ibid.).

5. The three key findings correlate. As this research proposed, in order to fully understand power we need to uncover and unpack its hidden relations. First, in the way power is situated in the heart of *faaSamoa*: the family/kinship relations. The *va* or Samoa's notion of relations between people has been well addressed in the literature as an approach to studying Samoan social ethics (Anae, 2016; Tui Atua, 2018). But as the literature also implied, and data affirmed, not much has been said about the flip side of *va* tending. Critical theory talked about the hegemony of a system which caused for minor narratives to stall, for some relations to stay unrecognized or remain hidden (Bourdieu, 1886), all being parts of a successful normalization of the system (Foucault, 1999). Secondly, the research affirmed how power is recognized in the various processes of governance. Rather than merely hinder, Samoa's multiple systems of government (*faamatai*, democracy, theocracy, elitist, oligarchy) have served the political purposes of power where necessary.

As instruments of power the government has managed to have made good use of the choices offered. Thus political action is recognized in a regime of legitimate processes; in democracy where majority rule is required to maintain power; in *faamatai* where consensus rule can support national development; in church where theocracy serves to the interests of the clergy; in political parties where elite interests are promoted. The culture enveloped the whole in a cloak of symbolic conformity. As a consequence, there is a tacit resignation to the whim of power. Thirdly, the question of how power is organised and exercised by those who wield power. Suffice to say, it is so much easier the task of organising power when the people could not distinguish themselves from that image of power as a collective identity.

6. Samoa is perceived as a strong state. Both literature and data affirmed. As noted earlier, the word 'strong' is highly nuanced. One group argued in support of a strong

centralized authority; the other expressed concern and worry with its political implication. Two participants of the research argued in favour, eight represented the latter who were worried. Implicitly, 15 at least agreed on the basis of government's positive contribution to the maintenance of good relations. When asked if government has become more authoritarian, 6 objected against 6 who agreed. The responses can only relay mixed signals. Can strong be authoritarian in the sense that things get done and political stability maintained? Or strong as measured against the voters concerns about accountable governance? Or the notion of strong where human rights are upheld and factored in the government's social policy? Supporters of government were quick to point out evidence of the good works done already. Participant 7 has attributed this success to the strong leadership of the leader of government. In response therefore to the question, how strong; it can be argued that it is strong enough to ensure that democracy has a chance to attain its full potential, from a progressive long-term viewpoint at least.

The reality is Samoa has posed own dilemma of opting for a strong state at the expense of a weak checks and balances system (So'o, 2008; Iati, 2012). So far the strong state has secured the perpetuity of democratic institutions for now. The onus is on traditional authority and civil society to fill this void in power relations that now tilts more in favour of the state. As mentioned earlier, P6 lay the blame squarely on the voting public for the Opposition's demise. Other than that, either the state or the people has to recreate from within or outside the system, some new forms of counter balances, that will provide for this gap urgently. Fukuyama (2014) contended that for a well-ordered society we need three building blocks: a strong state, the rule of law and democratic accountability. We need three of them together, he maintained. A strong state can guarantee the survival of democratic institutions, the rule of law can safeguard the peoples rights and provide security for stable government. It can be added, that the idea of strong is a reflection on the moral leadership of those who wield power – secular or religious (Burns, 2007).

7. Politically, the HRPP has held onto power for quite a while that somehow implies that relations created or arisen from have been legitimized and sanctioned by the people. This is to be expected when looking back at its formation and development as a political party. It was ushered in on a promise of changing unequal power relations economically and politically for the average citizen. On that pretext, a series of political

reforms have been launched, the significant of which involved the country's Constitution. The HRPP government also pursued a bold development policy that benefited the general populace and incidentally served to diffuse public disaffections that arise in the relation. Viewed as a political strategy, it has proven to be successful, considering the voters favourable responses during election times. Indeed, physical evidence of change are self-evident, and people are more convinced by what they see and make own judgements. The data reflected such positivity, with more than half the participants supporting the view that government is contributing positively to maintaining good relations. By any assessment, the average citizen is more concerned with the basic necessities of living than assuming power, or attempt to exercise their political rights to make things better. The mindset is, it is the politicians who can deliver because they are leaders, it is their sole responsibility.

8. The HRPP has run a very successful normalization programme. Learning from the experience of the past, it was evident that in order to activate power, the people needs to be part of its strategy. As said earlier, it is good for any government to be seen as standing in solidarity with the people. Seizing the opportunity to make drastic changes in the name of the average citizen was vital for the sake of power itself. Normalization then was possible with the consolidation of power through legislation and the people's support (Malielegaoi, 2017). It comes with a new symbolism, the launching of political parties; the HRPP as archetype, after weathering the course proved its mettle as a *tautua* of the people. With the transient presence of a strong opposition government, there is no other choice for the voters. Democratizing the system was normalized by the HRPP and now has become the norm however. Its tendency for infrastructural development is standard. Foucault referred to the disciplinary power of the state whereby normalization is a tactic, a way of exerting maximum control with the minimum expenditure of force; a means of constructing ideals, a conduct, a new way of doing things (1998).

9. The most basic principle of Samoa's power relations, the *pule-tautua*, has changed dramatically as the evidence showed. While more than half of the participants conceded to the traditional understanding of acquiring *pule*, there is a strong admission of its becoming a moral liability (Tui Atua, 2001, 2018). Simply put, the cultural idea of service that underscored such discourse is getting more irrelevant. The most relevant explanation is the power of money which has reevaluated Samoa's power relations,

according to P15. The way to acquiring power is through personal wealth, he said. Serving from afar is called *'aitaumalele* (Tui Atua, 2001) or *tautua mamao* (Tominiko, 2014). While the matai lives in Samoa his/her servers (*tautua*) live in Auckland or Christchurch who send money over for family or village *faalavelave* on his/her behalf. By the same token, the state, as *matai pule* (secular prime authority) is well served by its global diasporic community who've appealed that their *tautua* (service) be acknowledged through the vote, is still denied. This is uncustomary but understood in the context of power politics. Tui Atua (2018) referred to the predicament of the *tautua tuāvae* tradition for example, where money has become a critical factor (2018) in the reevaluation of services rendered or the choice of candidates. The Gramscian proponents talk about disarticulation and rearticulation of existing ideological elements; or in this case the devaluation and reevaluation of *tautua* in money terms and political interests, at the prize of old value systems.

10. The concept of *tautua* has evolved in the church too. Because God is the Prime Chief (Matai Sili), all are servers under his will. All power is derived from God, as the founder of Christianity claimed<sup>160</sup>. The participants were unanimous that the source of all temporal authorities is God. The Samoans have enculturated Christianity, even the message, thus making the church a reckoning force and *faiifeau* a very powerful institution on behalf of both. The irony in the title *faiifeau* (servant) cannot be missed in a critical evaluation; through *tapu* of the culture the *tautua* (servant) is transfigured into a new *pule* through the modern power arrangement. Everyone else (secular authority included) are *tautua* (servers) of God through the church and its ministrations. The cultural transformation also impacts on Christian theology (Latu, 2017)<sup>161</sup>, whereby the manner of doing *tautua* (service) is cultural. To serve the *matai* and the *aiga* is done through good works to the extent that the message, salvation by works is propagated; which contradicts with the Protestant's core belief in salvation by faith alone.<sup>162</sup>

Hence the term *tautua lotu* (serving the church) has become more a rallying call for the followers, honing the message home that a person's good works (*tautua*) is a matter of priority in his/her multiple relationships. The cultural pressure on both the clergy and

<sup>160</sup> Jesus is quoted in John 19:10-16 as he exchanged with Pontius Pilate; in response to Pilate's claim he has the power to crucify him, Jesus asserted that the source of all power, is from above (God).

<sup>161</sup> Generally from the Protestant viewpoint.

<sup>162</sup> Ephesians 2:8-9. Some churches though believe in the merits of good works as part of the salvific work in Christ.

laity leadership to maintain church reputations can be demanding. The consequences of their decisions on the average churchgoers are quite obvious when it comes to raising funds for the national body or committing a parish to an expensive project (Sila, 2012; Tuiai, 2012; Maliko, 2012; Nofoaiga, 2017; Latu, 2017).

11. In church too, while power is vested in the collective (general assembly), disciplinary power rests ultimately on a group or figure whose decision is final. The hiring and firing of the church's personnel is the prerogative of the authorities in a system that can be described as disciplinary. There is little room for an appeal to reconsider. Some would think that this is uncanny for a system which power relations should be seen to model transparency, fairness and tolerance. Suffice to say, the way power operates in the church at national level is strictly hierarchical and very much depends on those who wield power in groups or individually. So for any *faiifeau tautua*, the *tapu* of the *va* implies not challenging authority, or even taking the initiative which may not be to his senior's liking. Because the relations involve social status and livelihoods, the risks are high for the servers (*tautua*). The fact that one of its denominations is taken to a secular court by grievants of its own system, can only serve to prove the critics' viewpoint. It also serves to further highlight the dilemma of power relations for Samoa, due to having a plural system of government.

Participant 6 aptly described the dilemma: "The young critical thinker, with academic credentials, who enters politics or church mission, vowing to transform society for the better, yet once dressed in the attire of matai and power, is entrapped in the complications of own power relations. Once entrapped, then he is another subject, who ends up being an advocate of the system" (Foucault, 1982). To relate to power means conforming. Conforming means *tautua gūgū* (serving silently). For the sake of family honour and livelihoods, there is little to gain by being critical of authority.

12. Power relations between state and church under HRPP's tenure has never been exposed as much before. The issue of pastors' taxes no doubt has shown the vulnerable nature of relationships, even for a renowned partnership. The impasse between the government and EFKS has brought to light the hidden aspects of power relations, in traditional *tapu* that was reserved for the church through the *faiifeau*. It is an unwritten pact between state and church sanctioned by culture. Until the current government

decided to redefine the relationship by removing *tapu*. The EFKS cried foul, which seemed to have legitimate grounds traditionally; as well, very much part of the state narrative from the start (Meti, 2002). As noted in this research, while people were free to speak privately on the assurance of confidentiality, not many would be willing to criticize *fai'feau* in public. And if the state, with its own *tapu* be viewed likewise, then we can understand also why public officials hesitate to criticise the government publicly while in office. In other terms, the idea of exposing issues, institutions or high profile people publicly is a delicate undertaking for reasons of symbolic *tapu* involved. The risks of prestige, reputations are real. So are integrity and truth.

As mentioned in the Analysis, the results in favour of government's tax proposal said a lot about the changes in Samoa's power relations. First, the influence of education and a growing rationalization by means of liberal democratic values on the public, especially the younger generation. Secondly, the assertiveness by which government has pushed its plans ahead, even if that comes by breaching *tapu*. Thirdly, the strong implication of denominational rivalry; where the opposing denomination is singled out by the adherents of other denominations, whose pastors pay taxes to the government. The taxing of pastors is perhaps symbolic of the larger issues or societal concerns: social, political, economic and psychological, to which the church as a body can make a difference, in terms of how it can use its influence to address social injustice and discrimination for instance.

13. Power relations in the church, among its denominations and faiths are by and large symbolic. The three mainline churches, as the three most senior and populous, procure the most power in that sense. While the ecumenical spirit has drawn the 'smaller churches' into the circle, it is mainly tokenism not substance, as each prefers to hold onto own beliefs and independence. In fact the internal squabbles between the old guards and the new are mainly subjective, though they revolved around an old allegation that the latter stole the sheep from the formers folds. Which explains why their numbers have dwindled by the years. But even the relations among the 'three' have always been vulnerable if not entirely problematic. Behind the facade of cordiality and symbolic posturing lies the hidden power relations at work, the human intent to be competitive. The emergence of the row between the EFKS and the government on 'tax' seemed to have tested this supposition. Instead of standing together in solidarity, the other two



decided to support the government. The data results came out strongly to prove how people rally behind own church and their position in the argument. It has more to do with loyalty and allegiance to a religious identity than trying to be impartial. Saying that, all three churches argued that their stances in the argument were principled.

14. The village relations, particularly between matai authority and church authority, have also drawn much interest. Samuelu's study (1999) highlighted a trend in many villages where church authority tended to have more influence in the relationship. It is the church that now organises people, replacing old cultural structures along with rituals and belief systems, with its own. Traditional *faataulele'a* is morphed into *autalavou* for instance. This is evidential in the urban areas and will continue with the emergence of new village developments in the Apia vicinity. Such a new community model has own version in Samoa's growing overseas community. The church authority is the sponsor of the *faamatai*. The *faiifeau* is the head of a new government – a fusion of the spiritual and cultural; *faamatai* and its cultural representatives are free to practise own custom and rituals within the new space, on the understanding that *faamatai* and *faalelotu* complement each other. Would this be the future model for *nuu Samoa*?

Figure 5 (page 186) depicts a symbolic model of a new village *saofa'iga* (new arrangement), a Post Mission Village Model based on the reality of the power relations. Gradually, the church hall has become the situation of power at the village level, from a power position, posed a serious challenge to the traditional *fono* house (Samuelu, 1999). The undeterred ascendancy of the church and *faiifeau* in village power relations signifies this huge paradigmatic shift in Samoan organisational restructuring both physically and symbolically.

15. Of the relationship among the three arms of the state, it is fair to say that the boundaries have blurred as the evidence suggest. Particularly so with the HRPP taking full control of parliament. Symbolic relations maintained nevertheless. The truth is, political manoeuvring is a game of power politics and control, as P20 interpreted the situation quite frankly, it is in the nature of politics to be authoritarian. "If you're in authority you do exactly the same. You're playing the game well," she commented. In Samoa's case, the checks have become more a sacred trust of one branch of the government – the Executive. Strategically, the war of positions according to Gramsci is

fought on the ideological front, and by the way things turned out, the HRPP government is at a vantage position to call the shots, politically speaking.

16. Lack of political awareness among the public is a key issue. The voting public seemed immune to intellectual concerns such as checks and balances, which is alien to most of them. Like P1, who, when asked whether the government has become more authoritarian, responded, ‘these [ideas] were imported stuff.’ While European models have been adopted and indigenized, the government is blaming the opposition of thinking as *palagi*.<sup>163</sup> Thus the common law is viewed as *palagi* and foreign while customary rule is pure Samoan. In other words, the reality for some can be quite different. Participant 16 is adamant that there is no such thing as *palagi* or Samoan. P16 bemoaned the fact that many still cannot comprehend what it means to live under the rule of law. P16 even alluded to own parliamentary peers who think that there are two ‘laws’, the European and the Samoan. So out of ignorance or intent a politician or leader can shift from one to the other, depending on which one accommodates his/her best interests in a situation. In other words, understanding democratic accountability in this context of doubt, confusion and even misinformation has been problematic for both leadership and the voters. The average citizen with little knowledge of the law is the most disadvantaged.

Political awareness is directly linked to political participation. Having lived under the rule of *faamatai* for generations, it may take a long while for the average folk to rationalize the notion of living under a democracy, in the sense that they can participate meaningfully in their country’s politics. Even the idea of a grand democratization is bedevilled by the uncertainty. With current developments of the government showing a frank leniency toward communal rights over the individual, it begs the question: Which end would any such undertaking serve? Would the law to have all citizens vote be only for the purpose of upholding the status quo and elitist power interests (Tolefoa, 2017)? Or would it turn out to be the key to the full emancipation of the people through democracy that Gramsci envisaged? These are valid questions.

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<sup>163</sup> In reference to the current row between government and the Samoan Law Society on the three pieces of legislation that will transform Samoa’s Judiciary.

17. A critique of participatory theory has equated symbolic participation not with social change but social control (Brouwer, 2011). Cleaver (1999) talked about the myth of social changes due to open communication and consensus; the promotion of what Cooke & Kothari (2004) called, naïve assumptions about the authenticity of political motivations and behaviour in participatory processes. As found out in their study, the *tapu* of power relations turned out to prevent the marginalized from participating, while the very process legitimizes the voice of those in power. The impact of such an arrangement on the powerless is political inertia, meaning that either they have acted out of ignorance, fear of reprisal or given up on the system already.<sup>164</sup> Hence it follows that the common complaint against participatory democracy is, it is not participatory enough. The opposition maintained that the government no longer speaks for the people but the policies of own party. The evidence they said, government shied away from committing serious issues for the assent of the people because they would not risk the outcome (Tupua, 2020). In the same vein, the concern about the influence of partisan politics in villages where a ‘small group’ of influential matai dictate the power narrative on behalf of the council and all village members. It raised the issue of authenticity especially when it comes to electing candidates for parliament by consensus, as if everyone agreed with the decision.

As argued earlier, democracy has been appropriated more as a useful instrument to serve the whim of power politics rather than its true purpose, that is to govern by. Through its institutions a bureaucracy is maintained on behalf of the state, the same intent upon which power legitimation is processed through the electoral system. *I polokiki lava ia, o numela a le mea taua, o isi mea o teuteu. In politics [getting] the numbers are all that matters, the rest are ornaments*, Participant 3 interpreted. As Bates also diverged, “Parliament and polling booths are mere forms, the real content of which is determined by effective control of the cultural organizations, of the line of communication in civil society” (1975).

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<sup>164</sup> UIA defines political inertia: Lag in political attitudes and legislation with respect to the demands of economic and technological or social change reflects the unwillingness of certain powerful groups with a vested interest in the status quo to change or to relinquish current benefits. It may also be a function of an outmoded or cumbersome political structure or of inadequate traditionalist opinions. It produces a barrier to economic, social and political progress and serves to maintain existing inequalities and injustices, ranging from poverty to pollution. Political lag can occur on either the national or the international level. [UIA. The Encyclopaedia of World Problems and Human Potential Website.](#)

18. There is potential for traditional authority and civil society to countervail, as a few observers of Samoan politics would like to propose. Whilst we are quickly reminded of the complicated nature of the political environment; the hegemony of the culture and kinship relations, the overlapping of roles and interests between state and society, the competing interests on the resources, factionalism, and more potently, the concentration of power with a political party, there is hope in the fact that democratic institutions still can sustain a challenge, however. It has also become more obvious the fact that the input of the local ‘organic intellectuals’ is needed at this stage (Gramsci, 1992). They have the capacity to articulate public opinion ever more clearly on behalf of the people. The belief is that government can be countered with reason, with the logic of a good counterargument, to the extent that the people’s voice is heard and accorded with respect. There is also an appeal to the common sense that leadership is empathetic with the *tautua* because he/she has been a *tautua* once. *E au i le tauola e au foi i le fagota. He is a master fisherman who has been a basket carrier once.*

19. Social commentators, some of them matai themselves, have denounced the self-destructive path taken by the *faamatai* in the past 40 years or so. This is the predicament, that if the *faamatai* in the long run, cannot save itself from its own demise, then the state may as well do so on its behalf. The dependency on the state can be noted in the almost total reliance of families and villages on state institutions such as the Land and Titles court in settling their lands/titles disputes. There is much to risk in Samoa’s economy of knowledge, wrapped in the language, and the question of whether such task be given to the state, considering the pros and cons of doing so (Salesa, 2018). It appears that the goal of the current government is to appropriate culture, as much as culture incorporate the state. Participant 15 for example stands to represent a common concern as an insider, that the state may take advantage of such vulnerability to advance own political interests (Meleisea & Schoeffel, 2020).

The lure of money will always be a challenge if not the challenge. The fact that social and cultural capital are commodified, equated with ‘money power’ means Samoa’s *measina* will be susceptible to political manipulation (Ratuva, 2009; Bourdieu, 1986). In the final analysis, if *faamatai* can no longer sustain a moral mandate for the sake of the *faaSamoa* and its *measina* in future, then the final hope lies in the state. The same can be said of other sectors of society if the leadership cannot deliver morally for the

people. Either way, the risks in terms of unequal power relations are clearly evident, politically speaking.

20. Considering all possibilities, the search for balance in power relations, which ultimate goal is the betterment of all groups of the citizenry, and which liberal democratic ideals promised to deliver through checks and balances mechanisms, is almost won over to the political will, that is the government. To reiterate why, critical theory suggests that Samoa's power relations are well hidden by the *tapu* of culture – old and new. Any attempt to uplift some of the *tapu* is emancipatory from a social critic viewpoint. A case in point is the improved lot of women in politics and social issues, which came about by the strength of the political will.<sup>165</sup> On the other hand, defending certain *tapu* is still the right thing to do for many. The dilemma is in the choice. In Samoa's case, it seems that government has found a way to navigate among these *tapu*-based relations at will, recreating new forms of relationships, or old forms rearticulated or else disarticulated mainly through state legislation along the way (Ramos, 1980, 1982).

21. Insofar as the struggle for political hegemony tilts more in favour of the state, it is not difficult to work out who dictates the political narrative. For Samoa, such narrative is powerful due to its propagation in the people's own language. Language and social reality are related (McGregor, 2003; Habermas, 1981). The critical theorists conceded that a country's political discourse must be fought and won in the realm of ideology, embedded in the language and its media (Habermas, 1981; Horkheimer, 1982; Fairclough, 1992, 1989). The creative nature of the Samoan language has enabled its people to enjoy its multi-dynamic expression in rhetoric, the insights drawn from deconstruction and metaphoric discourses for example (Ricoeur, 1978; Degenaar, 1997). Some of the fiercest opponents of the HRPP government, who have employed English as medium mainly, cannot match government in terms of engaging and thereby influencing the vast majority of the population using the power of the home language. The leader of the government is noted for his plain use of Samoan; a preferred style by others over the familiar eloquence identified with the proverbial politician who relies on smooth talk but would not deliver; and with his own blend of sardonic humour is proven to be an

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<sup>165</sup>Opinions differ on the quality of such improvement; in fairness to the women's cause there were studies that need to be consulted in order to form a balanced judgement. A study by Meleisea et al. (2015) is one.

effective political tool in promoting government to the voters (Siikala, 2014). But as critical theory also reminded, language is far from being politically neutral – or simply amusing for that matter (Shore, 1982). Critical theory asserted that language is very much the essence of society's ideological activity, and therefore should be the main focus of power analysis. Words operate within a structure, within a set of power relations that affirm or condemn, appreciate or deny, praise or ridicule (Ricoeur, 1978; McGregor, 2003; Fairclough, 1989).

22. By the same token, the religious narrative is well entrenched through the home language. Basically, Samoa's religious narrative is the prerogative of institutionalized Christianity within the context of *faaSamoa*. The narrative is dominated by the church leadership in the clergy. This monopoly is defining because of its power to not only make people think as one but the ability to exert such power on the minds of many (Degenaar, 1997). After 190 years since the English missionaries arrived, it can be argued that the clergy-led religious narrative, first nurtured by the missionaries has not changed much. Years of normalization has it entrenched deep within the culture and language to the extent that it has been taken for granted. Hence the hegemony of any narrative - religious, cultural, economic, political - when it is no longer open to review; because it is declared *tapu*, predetermined as truth, its terms are considered non-negotiable. Critical theory challenges any such human imperatives (Linklater, 2007).

Degenaar (1997) reminds of the role of the church in power relations as crucial. He refers to the common term religion in its associated meaning, *legere*, like a censor who reviews society. Applied it means it is not satisfied with one or two readings but continuously. It means that social discourses were not meant to be fixed or predetermined but must continue to open to reason and reinterpretation. This is contradictory with the nature of political power though; both secular and religious leadership are more partial to sustaining discourses that uphold the status quo, for as long as the latter works for their purposes.

Granted there is political inertia in the political sphere, one may also boldly assert that religious inertia has taken deep roots in Samoa's own church sphere in these many years. Suffice to say, resistance or the reluctance to change has caused a whole lot of issues for contemporary ecclesiology, including Samoa; some of the issues raised in this discussion. Any sign of a prompt rereading may not be forthcoming at this stage given the current situation of power in the church.<sup>166</sup> The simple truth is that only by honest and critical reflection can society and its institutions be made more amenable to constructive changes, and the only way for any *tautua* to stay relevant in a modern world.

The gradual shift in church demographics from the three mainline churches to the other competitors has been a marked trend for church observers in the past fifty years. The LDS has been making great strides as the stats proved (See Table 2, p. 182). The third largest in the country, its ascendancy is noteworthy for comparative and qualitative purposes. Future projections will see the LDS cross paths with the Roman Catholic and EFKS within a decade or so. A number of factors are singled out. This includes the situation of power, embodied in the Samoan culture, upon which the three mainline churches have invested heavily, and which the LDS has developed a quasi-committal relationship with, making things less constrained politically and even socially conducive for growth. Its tithing system is viewed as sustainable, a fair strategy in church maintenance for all members based on individual affordability; its proactive proselytising work in the community has been consistent and has shown no sign of wavering.<sup>167</sup> Apparently, the equation of church power relations will be totally different in the not-so-distant future, if the existing trend stays the course.

23. The impasse between the government and the public on the LTC proposal highlighted a number of things. First, the delicate nature of the issue of leasing customary land now passed into law, and the furore it has created among various sectors of the community, still hovers heavily like the proverbial darkened clouds over the land. As the data revealed, the participants were divided on the issue, even ardent supporters of the government expressed grave concern and worry. A feeling of uncertainty came out

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<sup>166</sup>Misreading on the other hand is part of the religious inertia phenomena. Jesus accused the pharisees of misreading the Law for own purposes. Perceived by the people as advocates of the system (Judaism) they were in fact perpetrators through neglecting the parts that matter most (Matthew 23, Luke 11). Unless there is a genuine rediscovery of scriptures - by which a refutation of state sponsored truth(s) is crucial to its reestablishment - which could only be delivered at a cost, just like any high-risk rediscovery of scriptures, as in Luther's epitomistic act, or the Christ himself, with his life.

<sup>167</sup> Called *misiona* (mission) or *galuega tala'i* in Samoan.

strongly in the data. Now with another bill that relates to land, it only exacerbated the doubt, especially the clash in differing opinions, one from the legal fraternity that contradicts government's own. Secondly, the circumstances by which the three legislations have been introduced. While promoting a programme on its own merits, the process has been questioned. With power at its disposal, the government has been accused of side-stepping the norms, at least *va fealoaloa'i*. Like the issue of the pastors' tax, P4 strongly believed that this issue also could have been handled a lot better.

Thirdly, the call for a pause if not a stop in the way the government is pushing changes through at such a pace (Samoa Observer, Issue April 20, 2020). And some have added, at quite a wrong 'hour.' (Samoa Observer, Issue April 29, 2020). The concern of the public with establishing another state authority with not much assurance of the normal checks and balances installed is real (ibid.) Now they seemed to be up and armed (democratically) to prove their point. It may or may not be enough. Fukuyama (2014) talked about 'external shocks' that rouse democracy from its occasional slumber. For this perhaps, the public may have the HRPP to thank for providing the ideal circumstance; now Samoa has some potential competitors in the power contest come the next election; and in a backdrop of evidence of a severe disaffection in the HRPP party for the first time since Tofilau's tenure, could be concerning for its supporters, while encouraging for others. Ultimately, this may be the HRPP's true test of power legitimation and proof of invincibility, or else a precarious move that may in fact save democracy.

24. The unleashing of a new power in the field of information dissemination, utilizing the social media, has posed a potential threat to the media establishment. Caught in the middle is the average folk whose response to political action is dependent on the whims of information power at play. As the data revealed, many factors account for the people's perception of power. Such perception is shaped by traditional *tapu* of culture, religion and language. The fact that online disseminators are no longer answerable to the *tapu* of culture and own standards of human decency, will have far-reaching political implications on the future of Samoan politics (Tavita, 2018). Words to the effect of threatening to harm physically, emotionally, psychologically could no longer be taken for granted; already modern Samoan power relations has breached *tapu* violently with a minister's murder, not to mention many other incidents of similar description, mainly at the village level, when ruptured relations could not be mended quickly. For worse, this



new power could only compound on a massive scale. Public opinion is polarized. The government talked about imposing *tapu*. Left alone, there is little doubt that this new power will find its place in the future of Samoa's power relations, with all its risks and potentials intact (ibid.).

25. Samoa's international relations is another topic. What can be said is, such relations have served the country well at many levels. The benefits of mutual cooperation are self-evident, particularly in the building of its national infrastructure, economic and social development. By means of global obligations to the United Nations and its agencies, it serves the moral purpose of a wider consensus on issues where the people's concerns and minority rights can be articulated and given attention. The gradual emancipation of women and children is attributed to these instruments of power that wouldn't have been envisaged under the current status quo. With the absence of democratic means of checks and balances, the United Nations and its agencies have provided a new layer of checks and balances, at least in the form of policy advice or requirements.

Adversely, the disadvantages of being dictated to by these global powers are real, as research attested to (Long, 2017; Tuia, 2013). Unequal power relations is a price to pay by small countries, given also the fact these are the main donors in its economic upkeep. Not much can be done, particularly where issues of utmost urgency such as the climate change that require regional solidarity. Meanwhile the world leaders have been reminded by Mother Nature herself of the grievous cost of non-cooperation. Security-wise, the active presence of China against the growing animosity of traditional allies has the potential for destabilising power relations on both fronts, which may directly affect Samoa's own security long-term (Noa Siasoi, 2010; Ratuva, 2019).

26. The rise in domestic violence against women will have direct implications on power relations that is not only gender biased but tacitly legitimize violence against them. This is due mainly to an uncritical acceptance of misogynistic scripts introduced and became part of Samoa's common sense (Meleisea et al, 2016; SOO/ NHRI, 2018). The *feagaiga* principle has been the subject of much research interest, there has been a gradual critical unpacking lately. First, physical and emotional, where women are the target; second, symbolic, where the church and high society are implicated by not

speaking up (ibid.). While some research provide a glowing description of the *feagaiga* rationale, the reality couldn't be further from the facts. The talk has hardly materialized as a powerful public discourse or guideline for societal change (ibid.). The deficit discourses associated with the *faiavā* and *nofotane* institutions have come to redefine relations from a position of power and continue to do more harm than any good. The crass portrayal of the *nofotane* in the cookhouse as propagated in popular ballads stereotyping is undeserving, when viewed in the context of a sacred *feagaiga*. The irony is, that since the time the *feagaiga* status was shared between women (sister) and the village pastor, it has worked wonders for the latter and proved fateful for the former. The question of why this unequal treatment will need another research to unpack. Symbolic violence refers to an unconscious acceptance of such practices or introduced scripts (Burt, 2013; Bourdieu, 1986).

27. Talking about violence brings to the fore the whole issue of the people's mental and psychological well-being. As noted earlier, Samoa's stats on suicide has been well documented since the late seventies to the early eighties when she became the 3rd highest in the world and 1st in the Pacific on suicide committers per total population (Samoa Observer, Issue June 12, 2018; Issue December 19, 2015).<sup>168</sup> Since then, numbers could only fluctuate; the lowest was in 2009, 4 victims; though when put into context it is still a concern for a small country. Along with other modern youth related problems, root causes behind sexual abuse in the home, domestic violence affecting women and children, abandoning new-born babies for example, are no easy fixes. Suicide is an act of desperation by an individual and a strong indicator of the state of a country's mental health and emotional well-being. All of these pose a moral predicament for a Christian country and culture that revel in family and good relations.

28. To this end, there is logic in the argument that certain *tapu* need relooking considering the context of social reality and the human condition from time to time (Ramos, 1980; Bourdieu, 1999; Fairclough, 1992; Smith, 1999). It may not be good ethics the promotion of the *feagaiga* principle to justify an argument in favour of a male-dominated cohort, at the expense of the women who ironically were the original *feagaiga*, who are being disadvantaged in the power relations. The same can be said of

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<sup>168</sup> Samoa Observer. Issue 12/06/2018. Faataua le Ola is the authority in Samoa on suicide prevention programmes.

deficit narratives that need disarticulation because they support *tapu* that are no longer relevant to the overall well-being of a people. Outdated beliefs about mental illnesses implicate old *tapu* about angry *aitu*, have a direct bearing on the usual put-downs of those who suffer in silence. Even the coaxing by a church minister of some young male parishioners to strive to be like him (*tofi faifeau*)<sup>169</sup> sends the wrong message that the whole purpose of becoming a village pastor is for prestige and to be secured materially in life (Latu, 2017; Sila, 2012). This is reflected in P1's own take on the supposed motive behind the educated elite joining the church ministry (refer page 224). The shirtless antics can only reinforce a negative perception of the role of *faifeau* in society. The message as it stood since Martin Luther's Reformation, God called everyone to the service of his kingdom, by means of every useful skill utilized for the common good, not by social status (Nofoaiga, 2017; Tupua, 1989).

29. A point was made earlier about the dilemma of having multiple narratives, and the impact of this on social relations and to that extent, power relations among different levels of organisation. Most of these narratives are institutional and introduced. Due to differences in ethos and belief systems, they create tension and discord rather than bring the people together. Thus, when it comes to government – secular or religious - the question of which truth or corpus of knowledge we need to follow is both ethical and political. As knowledge becomes more an appropriation of the modern state, the premise is that under the state, it can be harnessed and handled much more effectively and responsibly (Foucault, 1997b). While the rational 21<sup>st</sup> century world assumed truth as relative and multi-dimensional, all leaders - secular and religious - have a moral obligation to the people in the maintenance of peaceful relations. Interpreted one-sidedly, the risks could not be greater, as we have witnessed the dire consequences in genocides and ethnic strifes globally. The way some of the world's leaders responded to the Covid-19 clearly demonstrated the power of deficit narratives, identified with poor leadership.

30. Thus it couldn't be more emphasised the role of leadership. Leadership is crucial in good government (Tuimalealiifano, 2007). There is a presumption that leaders with prior life experience of hardships relate more to the people and their needs than those who were born lucky. The Samoan terms for this life of privilege is '*ai lelei ~ eat well*,

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<sup>169</sup> Reported by a reliable source, the pastor allegedly impressed upon his listeners the merits of being a *faifeau*; the material benefits attached to. In the pastor's terms reportedly, 'one sermon is worth one thousand dollars.'

*moe lelei ~ sleep well.* Others may dispute such logic. Still the question of which kind of leadership is more connected to the people is relevant. The majority of the people are daily strugglers economically, they can answer for themselves, though many will not come out in public and say what they really want to say. In many developing democracies, the economic disparity between the haves and the have nots is growing steadily according to the UNDP figures (UNDP, 2008).<sup>170</sup> The proof is the income gap between the highest salary in the land and the lowest bracket (Samoa Observer, Issue Sept 28, 2016).<sup>171</sup> The cost of living remains one of the toughest challenges in Samoa today, particularly for the low wage earners (Samoa Observer, Issue November 5, 2017). As said earlier, the tax is viewed as biased against this particular group due to its regressive formula (OECD, 2019). For Samoa, the highest share of tax revenues is derived from value added taxes/good and services tax (40.1%).

Talking about the marginalised, education has become a game-changer for many who weren't born lucky. They may not be acknowledged in the traditional hierarchy but within the state and the church. Holding a state or church position has gained more prestige, thus education puts everyone on an equal footing however.

31. Gramsci still believed that full emancipation can be achieved through the democratic processes. He still prefers politics over any other course of action to arrive at a successful resolution (Ramos, 1980). As a choice democracy, inspite of its weaknesses, has the appealing features to the younger generation who've come to define relations more in equitable and ecological terms (Hayward, 2012; Va'ai & Casimira, 2017). They are the future leaders. As the data showed, choices cut across ideological boundaries and group loyalty. Talking with members of the community, especially the young voters, I quickly got the hint of the current mood in intergenerational power relations. In other systems of government, including *faamatai*, healthy power relations (if not equal) depend wholly on the high morals and benevolence of leadership (Tupua, 1987; Teachout, 2015).

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<sup>170</sup> UNDP 2008. Samoa: A report on the estimation of Basic Needs, Poverty lines, and the Incidence and characteristics and hardships & Poverty Analysis of the 2008 Household Income & Expenditure Survey.

<sup>171</sup> The head of state is the highest paid at \$200k plus per annum; the minimum wage is \$WST3.00 for the public service.

32. I have subscribed to the argument that the original concept of *malo* was partial to the *faumalo* narrative than the discursive acts of struggle for freedom. Any freedom narrative is a power on its own, nurtured by the people that inspires and empowers (Petit, 2003; Mandela, 1994). While governments vie for authority and do politics for sake of all citizens, they too are morally obligated to sustain this narrative for sake of societal well-being. For balance, both the *malo* and the people's freedom narrative need always to encounter each other courteously as in *soalauipule* or using Nafanua's *tafesilafa'i* strategy (Stuebel, 1976).<sup>172</sup> As in the Nafanua narrative, even in troubled times, *tapu* of *va* can be sustained for sake of family or ethnic preservation for that matter. To choose to remove or maintain old *tapu* requires good judgement. As a wise counsel put it, 'Whenever a fence is removed, it is wise to pause and ask why it was put there in the first place.'<sup>173</sup>

At the same time, breaching of *tua'oi* by the Matunas<sup>174</sup> of the world is punishable for sake of law and order. Salvaging for old time's sake may not be the entire solution. Yet telling the difference between things requires tact and wisdom, a noted theologian reminded.<sup>175</sup> No state can survive without discipline, Foucault inferred, yet the consequences of an overly disciplinary society are grievous and must be avoided as much as possible (Fukuyama, 2014). As argued earlier, the rationale behind any good government must be shown in its attitude to freedom; narrated by the people in their problems; it demands local empathetic leadership (Vaai, 2015; Nofoaiga, 2012; Sila, 2012; Tui'ai, 2012). To be shown to be a freedom fighter for the people is better for any authority secular or religious. Finally, it is for the sake of good government that these freedom narratives be nurtured continuously (Malietoa-von Reiche, 2011; Anae, 2020).

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<sup>172</sup> According to the legend, Nafanua was briefed by her father, Saveasi'uleo, king of the underworld (Pulotu) not to cross over the boundary of Fualaga (pa i Fualaga) in deference to family (Seali'itumatafaga). Nafanua herself lay out the war plan which the Matuna couple failed to follow and were punished accordingly. The four clubs were both literal and symbolic, according to Participant 3; each symbolized a war strategy. For example, Ulimasao was more than a strategy; indeed a military mobilization, the traversing back and forth between the two worlds and the risks involved; the invoking of Pulotu spirits through prayers to rally to the war effort. Tafesilafa'i was a moral and benevolent strategy on behalf of family. Fa'auliulito stands for courage and righteous power represented by the unseen hosts; and Fa'amategataua refers to the closure of the conflict and the final resolution. The interpretation for this research purpose is moral - the regaining of the balance of power on behalf of all people. See also Sio (1984) retelling in MESC Tapasa o Folauga I Aso Afa.

<sup>173</sup> Attributed to the political philosopher and theologian, G. K. Chesterton.

<sup>174</sup> In the Nafanua narrative, it refers to the couple which name is shared - Matuna and Matuna, who failed to follow the war strategy and were punished by Nafanua. 'Aua le to'ia le va' means do not cause injury to the good relations, as the Matunas had done by disobeying the rule.

<sup>175</sup> Attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr, American theologian. 1892-1971. Called the Serenity Prayer:

"God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

33. Arguably the story of the independent state of Samoa has been dominated by a political party for the better part of its 58 year history. Since holding power the HRPP party has embarked on a quest of consolidating power. It could be argued that the HRPP is the most ambitious regime to have ever ruled Samoa politically. With its success so far the question is, can other parties also do the same? Chances are with good organisation and strong leadership they can thrive too. Now someone posed the question of whether this pathway is good for Samoan politics is moral, but from a political standpoint, this may be the only way forward for the voters and democracy. The appeal for an urgent redistribution of power evenly has been strongly felt lately, with the commotion brought about by the induction of a potential rival overnight. It was interesting to note the aggressive rallying of the diasporic Samoan community to the cause of a new party.<sup>176</sup> With another strong party negotiating in power, this may redress the power imbalance. It may also generate some new thinking about power sharing at this day and age.

34. Lastly, it was obvious the subheading of this thesis, that the hold of the culture on the Samoan society is indeed hegemonic by Gramscian understanding. What also needs to be reaffirmed equally and strongly is, that there is still a lot that *faaSamoa* can offer for the Samoan people in terms of its aspiring ethics and social appeal which has made it enduring and almost indomitable. That such part of *faaSamoa* can be salvaged for its sake is less arguable. Because family and kins constitute lasting relationships their upkeep is almost guaranteed; and because part of the Samoan culture is big on identity, dignity, and political empowerment through *faamatai*, *teu le va*, reciprocity, and so forth, these are emancipatory ideals in their own rights. But as critical theory dared to challenge, the price for their upkeep has become an expensive exercise, mainly for reasons that have little to do with their moral underpinnings.

Critical theory reminds that no culture is immutable, nor should it be idolized to the extent that it cannot be scrutinized. It is people who made cultures – secular or religious - and it must always be a concern of responsible citizens when cultures which refuse to readjust ended up dictating the terms arbitrarily. Critical theory is opposed to empirical

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<sup>176</sup> In money terms the estimation is in the hundreds of thousands of Samoan tala (dollars) since the party appealed to Samoans overseas in a short span of time for help, and still counting. Such a powerful response is interpreted by many as a political swipe at the HRPP leadership by the diasporic community for belittling their transnational status and contribution to their home country's development. See also Samoa Observer report Issue 20/3/2021.

claims about the social world and its structures as immutable. Immutability implies that structured inequalities of power and wealth are supported whereas in principle they can be altered. Critical theory promotes the idea of a new form of political community in which individuals and groups can achieve higher levels of freedom and equality (Linklater, 2007). Thus, the need to check every now and then, especially when rituals, practices, narratives pertaining to turn into oppressive and uncaring systems.

## 10.2 Limitations of the study

As will be noted, the emphasis of the analysis has been on the macro level of probing and critical commentary. For instance, the caution to cite substantial evidence or names of people for cases that would have been considered too obvious to the reader or interpreted as culturally sensitive or politically motivated. Indeed, taking such things for granted may be counted as a weakness of the research, but I believe good judgement must prevail. As mentioned, the rationale behind taking a selective approach was a matter of personal judgement by the researcher. The intent was, that the focus had to be solely on issues and the subject matter, not the people or personalities.

Also, the *tapu* of language in the Samoan culture was upheld. Hence my decision to be restrained with quoting highly offensive remarks for evidence. This too may be counted another limitation, especially when considering the crucial role of language in critical theory. Hence the role of the Samoan *faafaletui* in the interpretive process, that due consideration be given to the unique context of the study and the delicate nature of the topic. I believe there is much to lose than gain when such cultural *tapu* are ignored.

Power relations is a huge topic, for example, the church's own has not been explored fully in its finer details; not to mention state institutions and relations in their own rights. What has been offered is a compact and comprehensive overview of the dilemma of power relations at the macro level mainly. The gaps for future research are obvious.



## Chapter 11

### CONCLUSION:

### RISKS & POLITICAL CONTINUITY

The Samoans take their relationships very seriously. Indeed it is the essence of their culture and custom of reciprocity. Tending to those relations is every Samoan's preoccupation (Anae, 2016; Tupua, 2009). Commitment to family, village, church, district, country can only be described as a moral investment en masse, driven by this powerful impulse of cultural identity. Which is why the concept *va* (relational space) has the connotations of power, risk, fragility and hope all at once (Read & Shapiro, 2014). As power, it has mobilized Samoans overseas to send millions of dollars in remittances to families and villages in their country of birth every year. All of these at the backdrop of a national over-representation of Pacific peoples in low skill, low pay and insecure occupational groups in the New Zealand workforce, and other places for that matter (Pasifika People in New Zealand, 2017 report).<sup>177</sup>

Overseas remittances continue to be Samoa's largest form of foreign exchange earner (Samoa Observer, Issue February 16, 2019).<sup>178</sup> A power relation unto itself, it helps stabilize Samoa's economy (ibid.). The economic impact of remittances as a leveller on the whole society cannot be underestimated. The editor of Samoa Observer, Lesā wrote: "The simple truth is that without remittances, many of the families here would find the cost of living unbearable. Remittances are putting food on the table, paying for electricity, water, land, housing, health and so much more. It's putting petrol in cars, giving buses good business and so forth" (ibid., Editorial page).

Tending to the basic necessities of living, from afar, which also include family projects such as new houses, cars, businesses, etc., to the village's own in the maintenance or erecting of new churches, houses for pastors, is a moral duty. This is the power of the *va* at work for Samoa in money terms. In time and labour. And much more.

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<sup>177</sup> Pasifika People in New Zealand. How are we doing? 2017 Report. Pasifika Futures. [www.pasifikafutures.co.nz](http://www.pasifikafutures.co.nz)

<sup>178</sup> For the 2017/18 financial year, \$503.73 million tala in earnings was recorded.

### 11.1 The risks

Thus the risks are personal. For example, the closure of a small business that was meant to sustain a family livelihood, forced a couple to return to New Zealand, leaving the parents vulnerable to public ridicule (Personal communication with source). It has put families in debts due to cultural pressure (Families Commission Report 2012 Wellington). Tending to the *va* has put pressure on the *tautua*, particularly the vulnerable, in village projects, family *faalavelave* or church commitment. Reports of individuals harshly punished by authority without a fair hearing; a family decided to leave their church because it's become unaffordable financially; children missing school because fees aren't paid due to cultural priorities; children being abused under the watch of church organisations, the cover ups.<sup>179</sup> This is the fragile face of power evaded as much in the power narrative. Unless this unappealing aspect of power be addressed nothing is guaranteed. People will continue to be subjected or simply submit as docile subjects of the system; others will resist or opt out altogether (Foucault, 1997; Gaventa, 1982; Tupua, 2001, 1989).

I have mentioned the spread of *faamatai* globally, with the church as the leading sponsor (Anae et al., 2020; Hunkin, 2007; Lafoa'i, 2007). Such an offshoot on new soils is thriving. Since the fifties the overseas Samoans have been doing their *tautua* for families, church and country of birth, yet they have to negotiate boundaries now and then for sake of maintaining relations (Tupua, 2018). While it is love of family, country and patriotism that motivate the giving, this may not last. Participant 6 speaks on behalf of a growing number of New Zealand born Samoans who have found Samoa's cultural franchise becoming cumbersome, doing *tautua* out of respect for their parents, oftentimes by coercive tactics (Taule'ale'ausumai, 2018; Tunufa'i, 2005; Tiatia, 1998). Unless the *pule* are prepared to invest in relations seriously, then the essence of *teu le va* can no longer be sustained and ultimately risks ingratitude (Bourdieu, 1986). Such investment implies the crucial role of *tofa saili* in the leadership that moderates the *va* between the culture of extravagance on one hand and that of principles on the other, for the sake of the powerless and marginalized (Vaai, 2015; Nofoaiga, 2017).

Secondly, the risks involve the future in the face of the current uncertainty. First, the impasse between the government and the opposition on what the latter labelled as a

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<sup>179</sup> Anecdotal evidence from reliable sources directly acquired in personal testimonies or published media.

campaign at dismantling the constitution. The government's move to promote communal rights and matai authority is described as a pretext which true motive is to exert more control on the village government apparatus (Samoa Observer, Issue February 13, 2021). The leader of the new FAST party has reiterated her disquiet about the future, that Samoa could be in danger of revisiting history, when any ambitious leader is free to follow own whim of interpreting government as they like. The risks of meddling with the customary rights of heirs could not be higher. For example, the promotion of the notion of *pule faasa'o* as opposed to *pule faasuli* is a no-no when it comes to making decisions on family titles and lands or any such matter, according to more than half the participants. The risks of such a move are highly consequential in a culture which governing principle is *soalaupule*. This move is divisive, biased against Samoans living overseas, according to Participant 6.

The growing concern about the abuse of power by a few matai who tend to influence decision-making in a village, especially when they become partisan politically, came out strongly during the 2021 election campaigns, when some of these groups asserted their power over the fundamental rights of other village members.

But the risks of political instability are far more serious. Power politics has driven the government's political agenda, according to the opposition. For example, the push to take advantage of its majority in parliament by enacting laws with such haste is partisan and political. Such development has manifested in the current mood of uneasiness. The fear is more radical reforms can only translate to more uncertainty and inertia. A lot is at stake with the failure of a state (Brooks, 2005). Beyond power politics, the pervading sentiment shared among patriotic Samoans the world over is that the state that bears its name will last. Critical theory supports the argument that democracy cannot be sustained by *tapu* of restrictions for long; instead, political stability is a by-product of transparent and accountable government (Habermas, 1981).

Lastly but just as important, the moral risks. During this discussion, the line between secular power and religious was fine and even blurred. The language strongly affirmed. This is the reality of Samoa's political narrative. Thus, we can only make sense of this reality as it appears. First, God's impartiality to all manners of human categorization, where class, status, religion, race, culture, genders, politics, systems make societies; as

long as humankind heed his will: ‘see that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God’ (Micah 6.8, Holy Bible, CEV). The modern state would not hesitate to draw parallels. But as the evidence suggested, the search for balance from a power position is always an elusive business (Haugard, 2012; Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index, 2017).

For example, *tapu* pertaining to an invocation of God to justify any human activity – least of all, politics – is such a risky business (Tui Atua, 2018; Mills, 2016). Using God’s name to demand more from the *tautua* is not only unethical but unprincipled theology (Tuiiai, 2012; Sila, 2012; Maliko, 2012). Even an atheist’s assessment makes sense, that power cannot be held as one’s possession, meaning that nothing is guaranteed (Foucault, 1997, 1991). It is the Covid-19 that reminded us of a profound historical lesson yet again, that whatever power has installed and claimed as *tapu* today may be uprooted by tomorrow’s own types of power.

Tapu pertaining to family relationships are just as riskier when talking about the ethics of *alofa faimeatonu* as opposed to *fai ma sē e tau i ai*. The fundamental rationale behind the modern state, that was to rid government of nepotism, cronyism, corruption and so forth, cannot be guaranteed in a real world, particularly in societies where the patronage system is alive and thriving (Fukuyama, 2014; Teachout, 2015). In developing democracies therefore, it takes much courage for any leadership to uphold the line of defence against these common enemies of good government (Tuimalealiifano, 2006, 2007; Transparency International, 2020; Larmour, 2005).

## 11.2 Political continuity

At the beginning of this study I wrote, “Last but not least, this research ponders on the question that is on the minds of many Samoans locally and abroad, the political continuity of the Samoan state. There’s a price to pay for Samoa’s political stability (Iati, 1998; Toleafoa, 2013); the vulnerability of small island nations to dominant forces such as globalization and corporate capitalism, is compounded by a moral uncertainty, fuelled by social media over certain issues of vital interest to the voters: the leasing of customary lands and legal matters pertaining to.”

I concluded, “With the general election around the corner, it will certainly provide some clarity at least to the current confusion. If by any chance a change in government happens after the 2021 elections, then it would be a clear sign of the people’s power. It would be an affirmation of democracy at work and a solid reassurance that the people only have the final say in democratic processes. But if at the end the HRPP continues its rule into the next decade, with not so much effort, then this will help answer the question of why Samoa’s power relations continue to behave the way they do for Samoa’s democracy.”

The HRPP has approached the 2021 elections with a lot of self-confidence. Another landslide win is predicted by its leadership (Samoa Observer, Issue March 26, 2021). Given the experience of living under the HRPP watch for almost four decades, continuity under the same political party, with another assured majority presumably, will have the people respond no more or less differently; though the new reality is it will be a different political landscape definitely; most likely an HRPP government will continue to choose to take ultimate risks (Rosa, 2013). Granted politics is about risks yet the stakes for any political party having a strong leader unchecked, in that sense unsupported, at least by docile colleagues, are factored into this analysis; taking this option for granted can be detrimental for own development and future political investments; a point that may be argued further if the HRPP loses the election.

One emerging reality that needs careful attention is the call from overseas Samoans for their voice to be counted through the vote.<sup>180</sup> The implications of saying yes can only be imagined, that such relation if prudently harnessed can benefit Samoan democracy; first, as a potential player who can leverage power from outside the system. To continue to say no may no longer be the best political option. A brisk demonstration of power by the overseas Samoans, in lending financial support to a party that is vying to replace the government, has sent a clear message to future governments, that is, its diasporic community is set to play a part in its politics for a long while. Invoking such a relation by offering the vote however, that will involve some high-stakes risks in logistics and demographics, is a challenge for a new government, to say the least.

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<sup>180</sup> While the government has made its intentions known about the matter, and even passed legislations to discourage such active participation, the Samoans overseas have been adamant, based upon a good number of legitimate reasons.

Most importantly, the people's consent. While power relations may have been passed on from one generation to the next as heritage or fixtures under old systems and human means of self-preservation, their relevance to organising modern societies must depend on the needs of the people (Panikkar, 1991; Tupua, 1987). The rule of consent is in the Article 21 of the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It says, "The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government" (UNDP, 1948). Given the options, it seems that only democracy and rule of law can provide a better deal – in spite of own weaknesses (ibid.).

In his address on Samoa's 58<sup>th</sup> Independence Day celebration of 2020, Samoa's Head of State is optimistic about its future. This is an extract from his speech: "As the first, and oldest State among the independent nations in the Pacific, our country has grown in terms of our population and economic development. A clear direction has been set for the future through sustainable development modalities, plans and priorities of government to provide for the country now, and generations to come. The knowledge and wisdom of our people have allowed them to confidently devise laws and policies, appropriate resources, and lead the implementation of developments in all sectors of the economy. These have required the close partnership between government Ministries and Corporations and our people, especially the support of our village chiefs and orators, church leaders, women committees, non-government organisations, private sector, and the business community. We acknowledge also with appreciation the love and support of our Samoan people abroad." (Tuimalealiifano, 2020)

The former head of state was quite as hopeful, whilst in the spirit of being remindful. In his address of an important Pacific symposium in 2013, he said: "Admittedly, we will not transform ideas into meaningful policy or action with smart retorts. We need to probe our premises, fundamentals, values, and visions carefully and continually. We need to understand our biases and prejudices, strengths, and weaknesses. We must have languages and ways of doing, teaching, and knowing that can speak to our minds and souls. We must be able to know when to adapt the old or take on the new; when to learn from our mistakes and share our successes. And we must do all this with humility and the right tools. It is this kind of careful deliberate continual searching (the *tofa saili*), and building and rebuilding of our foundations, that will allow us to fly." (Tui Atua, 2013)

Like the uncaged canary referred to in his foreword, political freedom is paramount, upon which Samoa's own search in *tofa saili* is safely grounded, in its nation building and rebuilding into the future (Tui Atua, 2013).

### 11.3 Final comments

The political dilemma of power relations will always be a feature of the modern state regardless of the nature of power contestations (Foucault, 1989). Such a dilemma, posed in situations, states and effects of power relations needs to be detected and explained critically by their root causes, in the contexts of good governance, the people's well-being, and most importantly, political freedom. The fact is there will always be those who do governance in terms of directing and controlling the conduct of the governed; the latter are as much involved in the process (Foucault, 1991). This is achieved through cultural hegemony, according to Gramsci, in which both sides share a common understanding at least of such a political arrangement; more notably the latter's consent to the maintenance of the status quo. Bourdieu (1986) could see right through and pinpointed cultural capital as the essence of this type of hegemony; hence symbolic power is real power embodied, objectified and institutionalized in most societies.

For Samoa, modern power is well placed in the politics of a reconfigured culture in which the state, the church and the rest of power holders stake much interest. Foucault interpreted these politics in terms of strategies or those which both the governors and governed reproduced as if playing a game of life, which cardinal rule is to minimize the domination of one by the other as much as possible (1997b).

The reality of power politics implies that the relationship between the governors and governed is never static but shifting and strainful though it can be accommodating too (Foucault, 1997b). In such a dynamic state, dilemmas of power are reproduced and manifested outwardly at times, in various acts of protests by the governed, or lapsed into a subjective, suppressed state such as political inertia or moral uncertainty. Placed in such a situation, the majority of the governed seemed to have tacitly accepted their lot, for less known and talked about reasons this research was keen to examine and critiqued in the lenses of critical theory (Linklater, 2007).

The approach to a resolution, as Foucault suggested, is political, pragmatic and ethical. He said, “The problem is not to try and dissolve them [power relations] in the utopia of completely transparent communication, but to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also morality, ethos, the practice of the self that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible” (1997b, p. 298).

As in sports, players play hard but compete fairly, upon a common understanding that no one is put at a disadvantaged position any more than the others. Despite the reality of the systemic imbalance of power in many developing democracies, the belief is, there are ways to counterbalance within a democracy; that each and every citizen can make a difference in this most basic and significant of human activity: forming government. Electing and sustaining good government is a collective effort, succinctly conveyed in the Samoan wisdom saying, *E le sili le ta’i i le tapua’i. Those that wield the weapons are only as effective as the supporters who will for a better outcome*. Interpreted, the Samoan ideal of government has always been inclusive, liberating and hailed as a moral responsibility (Turner, 1884; Habermas, 1981; Mesle, 2016, Tui Atua, 2013).

To this end, it is the ‘people power’ that matters, especially when choices are well-informed and free from political, social and cultural constraints, even if they have to work hard at it sometimes (Geuss, 2008). Perceived this way then, power can become an agent for good as Foucault envisaged; and in that sense, a tool of the divine will (Matthew 6.10).

In summing up finally, the risks of power, irrespective of country, type of government or dilemmas, cannot be separated from the hope in power to deliver for all citizens.