

4.8 Part 3: Samoan research and reference on power

For reference purposes I have found the following works useful. These studies by Samoan scholars/writers, penned and/or edited, have addressed the impact of state power and relations from a variety of perspectives: Anae, 1998, 2020; Iati, 2013, 2017; Liuaana, 2002; Malielegaoi, 2017; Malifa, 1999, 2010; Meleisea, 1987; 1987a; Meleisea, et al., 2012; Meti, 2002; Nofoaiga, 2017; So'o, 2008, 2007, 2006; Sila, 2012; Suaalii-Sauni, et al., 2018; Tavita, 2002, 2014, 2017; Toleafoa, 2012; Tuiai, 2012; Tui Atua, 1987, 1989, 2001, 2007, 2010, 2018; Tuimalealiifano, 2006, 2012; Va'a, 2001; Va'ai, 1999. While many of these works may not address power relations as a single topic, the implication for most is obvious. It needs to be noted also the vital role of the independent media, particularly the Samoa Observer, as the source much close to the scene. The wealth of information available was impressive for both government and the private outlets. The attempt to pick and choose may have been an advantage but was also a limitation.

Additionally, the reader will come across other references of Pacific authority, mainly those that are relevant to the broader implication of this inquiry. Given the diverse nature of the Pacific literature, with indigenous references to power and how it relates among its multitude of cultures, the best effort to be as inclusive as possible is unrealistic. I found the following works useful supplementary for my purpose: Crocombe, 2007; Davidson, 1967; Field, 1984; Garrett, 1982; Gilson, 1970; Hayward, 2012; Hemenstall, 1978; Henry, 1979; Huffer, 2005; Kramer, 1994; Lawson, 1996; Lovett, 1899; 2013; Naidu, 1988; O'Brien, 2017; Ratuva, 2019, 2019a. The list is by no means definitive.

First, Meleisea in his work, *The Making of Modern Samoa*, has become an authority on Samoa's story of the transition from colonial to the post-colonial. His thesis is summed up in this introduction of the book: 'Since independence in January 1962 several constitutional court cases have exposed the dilemma which the Western Samoa Government is facing, balancing *fa'aSamoa* (Samoan customs and traditions) with Western legal systems of authority. This book traced the clash between Samoan and Western notions of government and law from the 1830s to the 1980s emphasizing the hitherto neglected interpretation of events from a Samoan perspective. As a critical reinterpretation of the literature on Western Samoa, drawing on oral sources and material from the archives of the Land and Titles Court of Western Samoa, the book provides important new insights

into pre-colonial Samoa, the German and New Zealand colonial regimes, racial issues, and the contemporary political problems of the independent State of Western Samoa” (Meleisea, 1987; Meleisea & Schoeffel, 2020).

From the outset the author set the scene by introducing the dilemma of trying to balance the two systems of authority. This was played out in the interpretation of the two systems by the judiciary, where individuals, families, villages, districts, and even national government took their disputes to the court for settlement. The point of contention is the source of legitimacy. Legitimacy is power and therein lies the problem of how the two very different systems can cater to the demands of power as an unpredictable force (Howlett, 1998; Keenan, 1987). For this study’s purpose, Meleisea’s concern raises the issues of the situation and legitimation of power in society, which obviously for some belong in the traditional *faamatai* and governing jurisdiction. Others would like to argue that power belongs to the people. In democratic terms, the individual in relations, not an elite in relations. The argument thus, it is not so much the arduous effort of trying to strike a working balance, or lack of discernment in what is best in a system, rather, it is the risks of power without a rule of law that applies to all, that matters. Collective values could only be considered legitimate in a context where individual voices are accorded respect. The risks of unbridled power in the hands of an influential few, paraded in the name of authority, is the current reality (Toleafoa, 2017; Malifa, 2010). This is where the state comes in with the rule of law.

So’o wrote the *Democracy and Custom in Samoa. An Uneasy Alliance*. The purpose of the book, in his words, “This study examines the extent to which the dual existence of an indigenous institution – broadly known as the *matai* system and centred around a system of chiefly titles – and the legalized democratic political system have affected each other in the period following independence. It seeks to answer such questions as: Has the existence of indigenous institutions hindered or aided the progress of democracy? To what extent has the progress of democracy impacted on indigenous institutions?” (So’o, 2008). Like Meleisea’s, his work output provided substantial evidence of power and power relations at work in Samoa’s political frameworks. So’o’s main study reference also revolved around the same dilemma his older contemporaries addressed extensively.

The consensus is, Samoa has adopted a pluralistic framework for its political constitution, and as a result created own conundrum. Indeed, the progress of democracy has impacted Samoa's traditional institutions hugely as the evidence showed. For example, granting the universal suffrage has changed traditional power relations dynamics overnight. Court decisions in favour of one over the other continued to reinforce a discourse of discordance than otherwise. At the same time, democracy could not do without the support of traditional authority. In a collaboration with Huffer (2005) and local writers, the consensus is that the flaws of governance have much to do with a lack of understanding of the nature of the relations between the two governing systems.

While democracy is presented by So'o more or less as an equal in the relation, this thesis argues that culture as constituting authority bears far more clout. As alluded to earlier, symbolic power diffusion has enabled the incorporation and reconfiguration of different government systems to form the base and superstructure of society. Thus, it needs to be acknowledged as a syncretic mix and complicated to be taken for granted. It is hybrid in that sense, like an aggregate of all powerful things - political, social, religious, intellectual, technological, and so forth, irrespective of which label of authority. Democracy may be another name for authority, but it is also an instrument of cultural hegemony, a tool for leadership to exercise power as they wish (Ramos, 1980). So'o strongly believed that the two systems can resolve own differences and learn to coexist ultimately.

Tui Atua (1987, 2006, 2014, 2018) whose career as an academic was spontaneous but timely from the vantage point of lived experience and maturity. As said earlier, he was directly involved in Samoa's politics from the start, as a former prime minister and head of state. His first work was published in 1987.³¹ A collection of speeches, which first articulated his political ideas, and resonated into the second book,³² leading to two more publications in English, both reinforcing his original thoughts. A proponent of the indigenous reference, his approach to inquiry may all be too obvious, that the holistic worldview of Pacific cultures needs to be taken seriously in order to diagnose and even resolve their governing problems.

³¹ Titled, *Ia faaganaina oe e le Atua fetalai*.

³² Titled, *O le talanoaga na loma ma Ga'opo'a*.

Power relations to him is presented in the dilemma of the problem in relation to the solution. The way to explore these relations are multi-dimensional, he argued. In 2006, he presented a paper called, *O le faautaga i le faaluafesasi*: Insight into Dilemmas, making references to Barth's own dilemma in the concept 'God-sickness' and Thompson's own in what he called God-chasing (Tui Atua, 2018). God-sickness is about the preoccupation with the dilemma itself; God-chasing on the other hand, is about searching for truth, for knowledge of God in response. The dilemma of power then lies in what he calls, perspective and balance. The search for meaning is striving for balance between two opposing systems.

To acknowledge the dilemma is full acceptance of the reality; striving to maintain harmony requires an ethical approach. For example, the matai system is not an end unto itself; it is only relevant as long as it serves the needs of the Samoan public, he asserted (1987, 2001, 2007). The dilemma therefore is about the search for meaning in the dynamics of social relations. First with Tagaloa and past ancestors; then with the living. 'Samoa is family' is a favourite quote of his hence Samoan politics is family politics and must be understood as such. *Tofa Saili*³³ is the indigenous way in response to the dilemma. Through *tofa saili*, Samoa can resolve the dilemma of governance, even if all it takes is the most demanding of virtues (Tui Atua, 2020).³⁴ In the search for perspective and balance, *tofa saili* requires the wisdom of the 'long view' and the 'deep view', in the orators' insight (*faautaga loloto*) or the deep view, and the chiefs own (*tofa mamao*) or the long view.

By deduction Tui Atua's *tofa saili* can be interpreted in the cognitive-psychological functions of the will as a free agency³⁵ in the task of deep contemplation. Hence, the view of the man on the canoe deserves articulation because his is a close up on the daily struggle; he knows a lot about the will to live.³⁶ But he still needs the view of the man

³³ According to Tui Atua, the search for wisdom is an holistic undertaking that involves critical reflection that begins with the person who searches (Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2018 Edition; p. 245).

³⁴ Tui Atua is quoted, "All it will take is accountability, transparency and a lot of humility to solve our problems." Editorial Samoa Observer Issue 16/5/2020

³⁵ Freewill is something that human beings cultivate as part of their identity package, according to Foucault. He referred to this as practices of the self (1979, 1980).

³⁶ The concept 'will to live' is attributed to Schopenhauer in his work *The World as Will and Representation* (1818); the will to live is identified with the primordial impulse that drives instinctive behaviour/attitudes towards or against human reality. E.g. the desire to avoid suffering. The will to power is identified with Nietzsche (1844-1900) in his work of same title, who believed that the desire for power is the main driving force in humans to achieve in any activity including government. The 'will to meaning' is attributed to Victor Frankl in his work *The Will to Meaning* (1969).

on the land, whose will to power sustains both. Even so, both need the long view of the man on the heights whose will to meaning is crucial to everyone's long-term survival. Balance is found when all three views are consulted. Politically there is imbalance and discord when one view is shunned or kept out of the conversation.

Iati (2013, 2017), a representative of the diasporic Samoan academia, assessed the situation from a distance and thus a factor in his perspective.³⁷ His research question was, How has the HRPP managed to hold power for so long? Granted there is a power monopoly in a political party at the price of a sound democracy. Notwithstanding, there is every possibility of assuming or resuming good governance irrespective of the situation, with the presence of democratic institutions still intact, Iati argued. His concern about the growing dominance of the government in the relations is shared with others, who have interpreted its move to further legislate customary matters, as consequential for the future of Samoa and people (Samoa Observer, Issue Nov. 29, 2020).

Apart from the four mentioned, there were other writers/observers of note whose works have also been referred to throughout the discussion. As a group they presented a functional and relatively circuitous assessment of Samoa's power relations from each one's methodological choice. In other terms, they pursued a structural-functional approach in which political power is predicated on a mutual cooperation of diverse interests within a complex system (Varshney, 1978). This may explain why some of them have taken a pragmatic stance in Samoa's political development, and presumably, the future of power relations in its society.

The indigenous Samoan view takes a holistic approach whereby 'three perspectives' are considered; all three contribute equally to the conception of reality. Freely interpreted, this analogy by the researcher emulates in terms of the three basic functions of government: to cater to the physical, political and spiritual needs of the people, exemplified in the three works mentioned.

³⁷It may not be from his perspective but from Samoa's prime minister, who responded to Dr Iati's stance against legislation to lease customary land under the Torrens system. The ridicule was aimed at his allegedly non-presence at the original space of activity, implying a lack of first-hand knowledge on issue. No doubt the latter would have reciprocated in kind with own refutation. On the other hand, his 'diasporic' status may have been a factor in terms of expressing his view much more freely than otherwise; as well, the fact that the prime minister singled him out.