

8.2 Church

I have described the use of the term ‘church’ early on in this research. Simply in its collective nuance and which for this research Christian denominations which professed the same faith prescribed in the country’s constitution basically. As mentioned earlier, the government decided to amend the constitution to accommodate its Trinitarian position; that is, the belief in the Godhead of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The amendment has aroused much heated debate outside than inside Samoa’s religious community itself. Those who objected believed that the change was deliberate, the purpose of which was to exclude other religions which are not Christian (See Samoa Observer, Issue 29 December 2016; Issue 15 February, 2017). The government and its supporters would not pretend either, Samoa is a Christian country, they asserted. Samoa’s own religious mandate is summed up in the state motto: Samoa is founded on God. God is trinitarian to be specific. The point is, not that the opposition did not argue enough, rather the passing of the amendment was inevitable, particularly when state and church agree to agree.

In the backdrop is a constitution that upholds and protects religious freedom. They provide for the right to choose, practise, and change a person’s religion. A religion is allowed to establish own schools, though religious instructions in public schools are partial to Christianity. Christian holy days for instance are part of the country’s public holidays. The non-Christian religions own holy days are not part of the public discourse. Church missions overall have been instrumental in the literacy development of Samoa, right across the country, for the better part of the 19th century right up to this day. The renowned church-run pastoral schools in villages belong mostly to the CCCS and the Methodist, providing after school hours for many children. Mission schools cater for at least 12 percent of Samoa’s primary enrolment, and 38 percent of the secondary enrolment (Tuiai, 2012).

8.2.1 Composition and power diffusion

The census 2016 confirmed that more than 30 organisations/ denominations/ faiths practise own religion in the state of Samoa. The majority belongs to Christianity. Many of them are members of Samoa’s National Council of Churches, a non-political authority which main purpose is to nurture fellowship and cooperation among the group.⁸² The three mainline churches took up 60 percent of the country’s churchgoing

⁸² Established in 1961, called then Samoa’s Council of Churches.

population; the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa (29%), The Methodist (12.4%), and the Roman Catholic (18.8%). Apart from the Latter-Day Saints (Mamona 16.9%), the Assemblies of God (Fa'apopotoga a le Atua 6.8%) and The Seventh Day Adventists (Aso Fitu 4.4%) the rest or the majority thereof are below the 1 percent margin. However, their ascendancy in membership is counted against the decline in the mainline churches own, since the 2001 Census. The EFKS, holding more than half the total share in 1961 (53.6%) lost almost half within a 55-year span (24.6%). Though still the majority at 29%, its downturn has been rapid compared to the other two. The Roman Catholic lost 2.8 percent; the Methodist 3.6. By contrast, the Latter-Day Saints, at 6.3 gained 10.6 percent; the Seventh Day Adventists at 1.3 gained 3.1 percent; the AOG from 0.5 gained 6.3 percent. Of the 97 percent of the churchgoing population only 2.5 percent belongs to the non-Christian religions. They include the Baha'i, Islam, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.⁸³ Reports of activities in relation to Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism have been noted (Ernst, 2006).

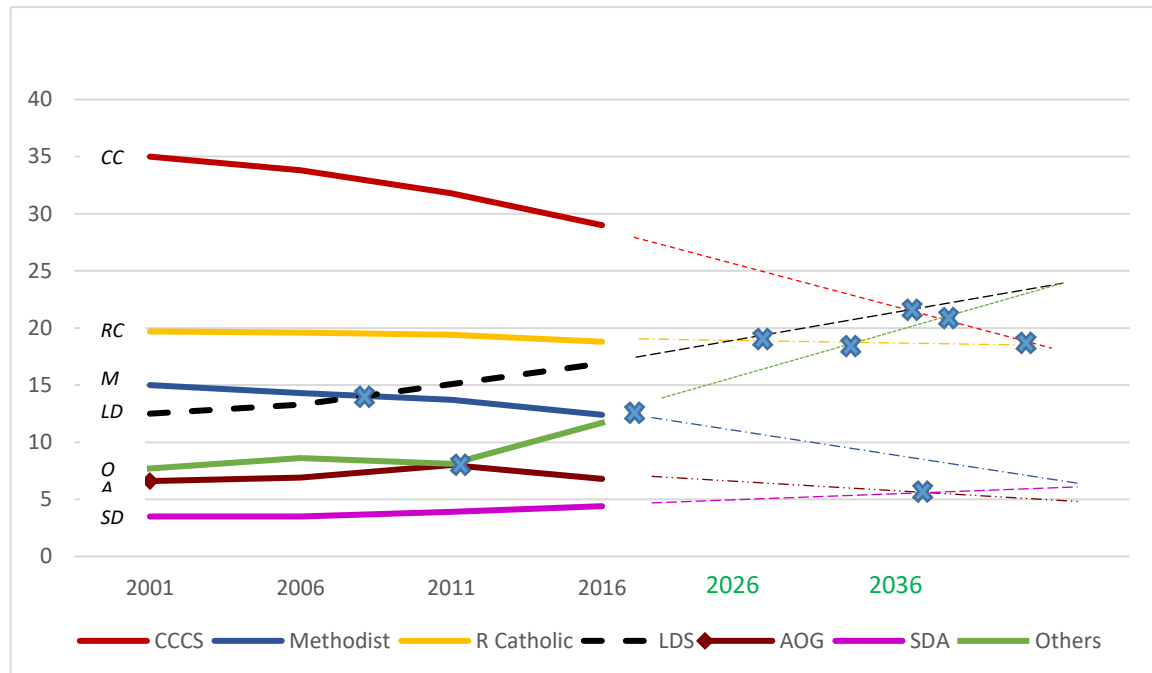
Table 2: Samoa's Church Affiliation: Demographics 2001- 2016⁸⁴

Affiliation	2001 census	2006 census	2011 census	2016 census
CCCS	35.0%	33.8%	31.8%	29.0%
Methodist	15.0%	14.3%	13.7%	12.4%
Roman Catholic	19.7%	19.6%	19.4%	18.8%
Latter-day Saints	12.5%	13.3%	15.1%	16.9%
Assemblies of God	6.6%	6.9%	8.0%	6.8%
Seventh Day	3.5%	3.5%	3.9%	4.4%
Others	7.7%	8.6%	8.1%	11.7%

Source. Samoa Bureau of Statistics. Census 2016

⁸³ Samoa's Baha'i is considered a religious minority (0.4%) yet noted as hosts of one of Baha'i's seven major temples; the Muslim community has only 87 members. The Jehovah's Witnesses (0.8%) is the most active of the three in its door to door proselytizing.

⁸⁴ Others in census records include smaller groups yet to officially identify themselves; there may be more than 30 according to a reliable government source.

Figure 4: Church Affiliation: Demographics 2001-2016 & Future Projection

As the graph shows, the trend in ascenders vs descenders denotes a seemingly irreversible pattern that is symbolic of a societal shift from old to new loyalties and preferences. Translated into a demographics of power of leverage, the so-called new churches, together with non-Christian religions, comprising at least the current 40 percent, may likely hit the 50 percent mark within a decade or so, if the current progression stays the course. As with any demographics involving social relations, it is the distribution and concentration of power that determine the dynamics of such interactions (Brams, 1968). In that sense it is the difference in scores that count first and foremost. Like any power relations, numbers make the difference between the principal actors and the aspiring contenders (*ibid.*).

8.2.2 Church relations and power

The history of Christianity⁸⁵ in Samoa is a commonplace in literature, the attention of many research past and present (Taase, 1995; Sila, 2012; Ioka, 1998, Liuaana, 2001; Tui'ai, 2012; Faalafi, 1994). They provide the authoritative basis for information and perspective. A quick glance backward reminds the reader that the relationship among the churches has all but been smooth sailing. With ample evidence,

⁸⁵The early literature on the Christian religion in Samoa was the collective effort of the missionaries themselves.

it is only fair to conclude that the struggle for territory among the three missions, in the formative years, marked the beginning of church relations. It also marked the start of a tumultuous relationship.

First, that between the LMS and the Wesleyans. The tenacity by which both sides approached the relation aptly described the reality of the moment (Garrett, 1982). The LMS though having the advantage in terms of manpower and organisation; as well, the support of a prominent figure in Malietoa and clanship, was equally matched by the Wesleyan's own royal patron in the figure of the Tongan king and local Samoan cohorts. Oral evidence attested to the *lotu Toga* existing in various parts of the country, supported the claim that there was a Wesleyan connection already (Alailima-Eteuati, 2007). The evidence pointed to a proselytizing campaign by both, very much on an equal footing until 1839 when the Wesleyans retreated leaving the field alone to the LMS. The Wesleyan mission resumed activity 18 years later, by then the Roman Catholic has entered the scene, taking its share of the populace and assertion in the power relations. While the Wesleyans retained old traditional footholds, the LMS had taken long strides, securing its dominance in Samoa's power relations, as the demographics indicated. George Brown became a key figure in this relaunching, so as E.G. Neil and others that came later.

Secondly, that between Roman Catholicism and adherents of Protestantism. The entry of the Catholics on the Samoan scene changed the dynamics of power relations for the church even more. Old hostilities between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in Europe had opened own front in the Pacific. With news of its arrival a hostile reception was anticipated. Violette observed, 'Before we had been ashore, in a land that refused to be hospitable to us, we were sowing consternation in the Protestant army, composed of sixteen ministers, and several well organised teams of catechists, with powerful chiefs for support!' But the Catholics found its own George Brown in Louis Elloy, like Brown, an able diplomat. Under his leadership the Roman Catholic mission gradually made headways in terms of developing prestige and moral influence. While both the LMS and the Wesleyan leadership were implicated in colonial politics involving the three powers, Elloy, was viewed as an impartial negotiator (Garrett, 1982).

In the end, such mitigating influences of a few individuals worked both ways. First, to the mending and improvement of relations among the three. Secondly, to advancing the cause of each mission by tacitly acknowledging each one's presence in the field. But as argued earlier, the most powerful agent in the mending of relations was the culture itself, in its principles of *va fealoaloa'i* and *ava fatafata*; strategies which the Samoans knew better about than their European leaders and mentors; especially when Samoa regained its independence and old rivalries among *tamaaiga* factions subsided.

8.2.3 The village power model and church authority

It was natural that the localization of the church followed a village model.⁸⁶ This seemed an ideal choice for a number of reasons. First, it is the most cohesive ecosystem of social organisation in Samoan society. On that factor alone, political stability is guaranteed, even the economic sustenance of its workers and church in general (Tuiai, 2012). Not to mention the ease by which mobilized people can facilitate further mobilization into new allegiances. Second, it aligns naturally with the people's choice, the idea of appropriating a new religion is always viewed from a cultural mindset. Church as source of a new mana lends more respectability and prestige to the village hierarchy and immediate community (ibid.). On this understanding, a village authority obviously would not wish to jeopardise its dignity by sharing the same platform with another village. Thirdly, it was viewed along the lines of Samoa's traditional *tapuaiga*⁸⁷, which has always been a localized activity for generations. The village authority has been instrumental in its maintenance. Hence the most obvious priority in the minds of the first two missions was to train pastors, for this purpose of serving in every Samoan village.

⁸⁶ Tuiai (2012) provided own thorough report of the 'village based model' from the EFKS perspective.

⁸⁷ Dr Turner's recount of old Samoan worship in his book *Samoa, a hundred years ago*, attested to this. Personal communication with Rev Elder Tumama Vili complemented.

of boundary is installed which crossing over is almost non-negotiable. Critical theory argued that the relationship between linguistic forms and ideas of reality are binding; hence any political discourse associated with is loaded with meanings that are predominantly ideological (McGregor, 2003; Fairclough, 2001).

The *Nu'u o Ti'akono* (village of deacons/deaconesses) is a new model refashioned from the old order (Ramos, 1980). Also known by the terms *nu'ulotu* – church village, *aigalotu* – church family, *aiga o le Atua* – God's family, *nuu o le Atua* – God's village. As an instrument of the new social order, it is the new vanguard as opposed to the *Faleupolu*, representatives of the old guard *Tumua ma Pule*, protectors of the old *mana*. The *ti'akono* is the new orator. As a cohort they are also the new *tautua* (servers), the equivalent of the *matai tautua* in the old order; instead, they serve God through the church. Their loyalty lies in the church, as a group the workhorse of the new order. Both the symbolic and literal incorporation of the two flanks – *Faleupolu* and *Sa'o Tama'ita'i/Sa'o Aumaga* in the *Nuu o Tiakono*, has recreated a new image of a serving community. The identities and roles are redefined, more so the shift in dynamics of power relations felt. The demarcated line between the new order and the old has become more blurred by the day, symbolically speaking. While most *ti'akono* (deacons/ deaconesses) are also *matai* of their families and villages, their political allegiance and loyalty to either authority are by and large compromised.

The black arrows in Figure 6 indicate the forward thrust of dominant forces of church in the struggle for assertion of power over traditional institutions' own. The blue arrows stand for pockets of resistance that provide the checks and balances much needed in the power relations. In the final analysis, the struggle for hegemony is underscored by a moral dilemma of 'one servant serving two masters.'⁹² As the struggle for relevance is always ideological, what both the church and traditional authority can only do is negotiate terms of power relations continually, in and through the minds of the common people.

8.2.4 New power configuration

In the LMS work, Christianity was adopted and acculturated to serve the whim of culture, hence its popular support in the early days of missioning. High chiefs kept

⁹²Bible: Matthew 6.24

missionaries like prized possessions which motive was political, the appropriation of the new *mana* (Williams, 1984). In the bargain, the hosts had to pay a price. The attempt by the missionaries to discard old *tapu* indiscriminately exposed a lack of good judgement, for example, the LMS insistence on doing away with customary rituals (Wendt, 1996; Maliko, 2014). As church influence in village affairs grew, a shift in power relations was imminent. As the new regulator of morals and values the church would come to play a very powerful leverage in the village relations of power. A *faiifeau* can chastise the village leadership, sanctify and bless the people; authorise people to perform certain roles, intervene as mediator among feuding parties in case of emergencies; summon the aid of God during troubled times, and most notably his pastoral role of sustaining the moral strength of the populace by his preaching.⁹³ He is the modern priest who came into being in a new institution called *faafaiifeau*, pastorship. Symbolically, he is the bridge between the old and the new dispensation.

The extent of such a shift in power relations has been the focus of several research. While others may view the role of the church as a new form of *tapu*, substituting *faa-Samoa's* own system of checks and balances, that is, curbing the abuse of power by village authority, others are worried about church leadership having too much power.⁹⁴ Samuelu (1999) studied the impact of a church on the social structures of a Samoan village. His context of study was [Vaisulu], a village in urban Apia vicinity. His argument was, 'the dominant power of the church contributes to the erosion of traditional Samoan social structures and values in [Vaisulu]' (p.119). Samuelu pointed out the waning influence of traditional chiefs and the village *fono*, as the focus becomes more concentrated on the *faiifeau* and church by the day.⁹⁵

The shift from a traditional *malae fono* (meeting place) to a place of worship is highly symbolic of the trend in power relations in favour of the church. Value wise, the democratic framework of the church itself, along with its promotion of own principal values, resulted in a moral dilemma, two sets of values, one traditional-communal, the other

⁹³ Personal communication with Reverend Elder Tumama Vili.

⁹⁴ The majority of the participants of this study shared this concern.

⁹⁵ Traditional chiefs which claim to authority is hereditary are contrasted to *faiifeau* which own legitimation is through the church and the culture. His transformation is unique; while a *taule'ale'a* (untitled) he is treated like a high chief due to his status as *feagaiga*. As spiritual leader he is the father figure of all, including every manner of chief, all of whom defer to him. Culture has reserved his first placing in traditional salutations and meal serving. Participant 1 remarked that new practices continue to seep into the culture pertaining to the *faiifeau's* role. See Meleisea (1987), p.18.

democratic-individualistic. For instance, while traditional authority defers to age, seniority and ranking in culture, the church could not differentiate basically. Hence the idea of bypassing the old members by giving leadership roles to the young is perceived as uncustomary (ibid.). Due also to the fact of its autonomy, the village church is a government of its own, its members answerable only to the pastor who is answerable only to the mother church. Unless of course village rules have been violated would matai authority intervene; but most of the people have rallied to their churches, their routines revolved around church activities on a weekly basis. With the dying out of *auluma* and ‘*aumaga*’⁹⁶ in many villages – in urbanised areas notably - the concern is that the youth has missed out on a solid cultural orientation as Samuelu pointed out.

In their places the church has substituted its own in the *autalavou* (Methodist, Catholic youth groups), ‘*autaumafai*, ‘*auleoleo* (EFKS), *a’oga Tusi Paia* (Bible study classes), for example. As it turned out, church authorities have become more and more society’s main sponsors on beliefs and ideological orientations. Also, with the gradual loss of influence in the matai council to rally the people as it were in the old days, there emerged a new formation of micropower clusters; new relations of power that revolve around ecclesiastical authorities and beliefs. Members of the village *fono* are also leaders of their churches. Others may be influential in church but not in the council. Samuelu’s study attested to the ascendancy of the church as the trend.

Perhaps one of the most notable evidence in support of church becoming more assertive in the relation is that of the *faiifeau* entering the space of matai, that is, the village political council and sphere. For example, the blessing of a *saofa’i* (title bestowal) that used to be the preserve of a *tu’ua* (senior orator), or a high-ranking matai has gradually been handed over to the *faiifeau*. The *faiifeau* by custom does not have a sitting post in the village matai council, nor partake in the cultural protocols such as the ‘ava ceremony. His space is the church where his blessings are imparted upon the chosen candidates, in a separate ceremony prior to the cultural ritual performed by the matai cohort themselves. This is the procedure observed in *Lau* village (refer page 237); the rationale according to P11 is to maintain the *tapu* of *tua’oi* or the *va tapuia* between the two authorities. Now with the *faiifeau* doing the role of *tu’ua* or culture for that matter, the

⁹⁶ The demise of the two institutions is self-evident in some spaces though they still remain strong in the rural areas.

breach in *tua'oi* and sacred relations is obvious. Otherwise, 'breach' may not be the right word, rather rebridging the ancient gap which had been the preserve of the *taulaitu* and *taulasea* or the sacred priests of old. Perhaps in that sense, the restoring of the old was preordained.

Similarly, another change where the *faiifeau* is perceived as crossing the line is the *fa'atau* (customary negotiation among orators to select a speaker). What used to be the prerogative of *tamalii* or *tapa'au* of the village to bless has also become another hand-over to the *faiifeau*. Participant 1 argued that this is uncustomary, given that the *faiife'au* as symbolic *feagaiga* has taken over another role, not to mention an intrusion into the cultural space. The two examples serve to underline the transition of power or its subtle transfer in favour of the church. This has been the trend as witnessed in the power relationship between church and *faamatai* overseas.

8.2.5 Church power configuration and organisational ethos

Talking about church government, Samoa's own is a mix of European and local elements. The early LMS missionaries established own version of Calvinism that in many ways fit or reflect Samoa's socio-political environment (Ioka, 1996; Garrett, 1982). First, the autonomous character of a village polity reflects the sovereignty of its local church authority, an essential quality by which Congregationalism is known for (Tui'ai, 2012). Congregationalists in general, believe in the equality and priesthood of all believers, the freedom of each member to interpret Scriptures, and in social organisation the right of members to run own affairs autonomously through democratic means and systems. Every local church congregation is independent, ecclesiastically sovereign, and thus autonomous (Britannica.com).

8.2.5.1 *Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano i Samoa (EFKS)*

The general assembly (*Fono Tele*) is the highest authority of the CCCS in terms of making decisions and policies. Facilitated by a chairman, the general assembly oversees the administrative apparatus, in the form of six (6) committees that report to the assembly on a yearly basis. There are eighteen (18) districts under the general assembly, 9 in Samoa, 9 overseas.⁹⁷ Districts are divided into subdistricts each of which is presided over by a *toeaina* (elder minister). A district conducts own meetings and passes motions on any matter of importance to the unit or the collective interest; that may become part of the general assembly's next agenda. The *Fono Tele*⁹⁸ has the final say. Otherwise, the panel of *Toeaina Faatonu* (directorship of elders) has become the arbitrary arm of the *Fono Tele*, including personnel matters, including the conduct of its church ministers where it affects the constitution or church reputation. Their pronounced influence at district and the general assembly is premised on their privileged status as leaders, making them an indispensable force in EFKS power relations (Tuiai, 2012).

At the village level the *faiifeau*, pastor, is the overseer of the church administration and all religious activities under his jurisdiction. Next to are lay deacons who are organisers and sponsors of the church, financially and culturally. There are lay preachers who support the *faiifeau* in his pastoral responsibility. At times, misunderstanding on the extent of the pastor's authority may lead to a breakdown of relations with parishioners; the *faiifeau* believes his jurisdiction to knowing and even managing overrides any authority under his watch. Participant 6 expressed a view of those who believe that the *faiifeau's* only part in the government is the spiritual (the pulpit); ministering in the Word and spiritual development of the people and leaving the administrative aspect to the laity.⁹⁹ This has been a contentious issue for overseas Samoan churches especially, liberal parishioners challenging the notion that the *faiifeau* is the sole overseer of the church operations. Such matter has not been resolved entirely hence still left to linger in the people's minds.

At the base of the structure are parishioners, in active participants who share in the church's religious life, and the quasi-active who attend but not so much obligated in that sense of wholesome commitment.

⁹⁷ The number will change to 20 soon according to Reverend Elder Tumama Vili.

⁹⁸ The EFKS's annual general meeting normally held at Malua in Samoa.

⁹⁹ Highlighting a difference in opinions, not fully resolved.

Indicative of the EFKS organisational ethos is the blend of the Samoan culture and Calvinistic Christianity.¹⁰⁰ This makes for a unique if not contentious relationship, as the influence of Calvinistic principles which champion equality, individualism, transparency, tend to contest the communalistic pull of the Samoan culture and its trappings. The EFKS adherents argue that its system is different from others due to its grounding in the *feagaiga* principle. Persisting in its cultural interpretation of modern power relations is part of the current misunderstanding between itself and the government's own assertion. This point will be pursued further under Analysis Chapter.

8.2.5.2 *Ekalesia Metotisi i Samoa*

Structurally the Methodist model of organisation shares more similarities than differences with the EFKS. Like the *Fono Tele*, the *Metotisi* has own general assembly widely known, *O le Koneferenisi* (the conference). The conference has the powers to make decisions on issues that are put through the synod and recommended for approval by the general assembly, very much like the EFKS procedure. There are 12 synods altogether, including New Zealand, Australia, and American Samoa. Each synod, under the watch of a seer (*sea*) attends to own development. He is also the key facilitator in the financial upkeep of the mother church. The Methodist too is village based and emulates the village model of organisation. The pastor (*faiifeau*) is the head of the village while *ulumatāfale* (heads of families who sponsor church activities) make up the village. The *ta'ita'i* (group leader) and *failauga* (lay preacher) support the pastor in his pastoral duties.

While the point of difference between the two is in the appointment of village pastors, the cultural underpinning pertaining to the office is very much shared. Another point of difference is with the executive arm of the Conference; in the *Komiti Tumau*, which role is part executive part administrative, and members include the laity; then the office of the president, which has overriding powers to make decisions, particularly in cases of emergencies. Still another point of difference is the selection of women to the role of *failauga* (lay preacher). Like the panel of directing elders of the EFKS, the president exerts a lot of influence on the church's own power relations as mentioned. The president's tenure though is temporary, which means that concentration of power on a figure or panel for too long is avoided.

¹⁰⁰ Calvinistic teaching provides the basis for the Presbyterian Church model of government.

Finally, while the EFKS *faifeau* stays in a village by the decision of the parishioners, and probably for life; his *Metotisi* peer is welcomed but for a temporary stay. His conduct and performance are part of his appraisal in the next round of *tusi tofiga* (list of appointments to new pastures). Given the highly centralized nature of its power structure, this has left the average pastor more vulnerable in the relations of power. Sometimes a negative report from parishioners to the central authority is enough to dismiss their service; where minor allegations are involved; they can be disciplined through the church's own disciplinary procedure (Communication with Participant 3).

8.2.5.3 *Katoliko Roma*

Samoa's Roman Catholic follows the universal model traditionally sanctioned by the authority in the Vatican, with some modifications that reflect the environment. For instance, in the institution of the *fesoasoani*, an equivalent of the EFKS *a'oa'o fesoasoani* who can lead church services but not the Mass. The office of *tiakono* was a recent addition. The parish priest is the overseer of a diocese and under the authority of a bishop. Currently the head of its hierarchy and ruling authority is in the figure of a monsignor, who too is the archbishop of the Samoan islands and Ecclesiastical Superior of Tokelau. While also based in villages, the constraints of the culture on its workers are not as marked as the other two; part of which is due to a different remuneration system. An average monthly stipend makes do, and with no spouse and children to maintain, puts less pressure on them. The cultural impulse of competing and striving to outdo each other financially is not encouraged; people give whatever they can afford.

Of the three, the Catholic workers have demonstrated a keener sense of social commitment in the care of the needy and marginalized, with not much care for accumulation of material possession. Its religious orders in nuns, brothers, catechists, priests, monks, laity, have proven such an ethos in its social services, including a rest home for the ailing elderly on Upolu Island. An initiative by the late Cardinal Pio Taofinuu was meant to alleviate financial pressure for the average family was noted earlier. Its take on the culture is by and large symbolic, in the sense of adopting its symbolism to enhance own liturgy mainly. Not that the culture is any less significant than the fact that it is less imposing, as proven in the practice of donating secretly for the upkeep of the church, for instance. Distancing temporal duties from the worship is a mark of Catholic distinction. In principle, the culture reserves own time and space.

8.2.6 Power relations in the Church

Literature offers little about an in-depth look into the dynamics of contemporary power relations within the three main churches, individually and collectively. Saying that a few studies have addressed many concerns in relation to the imbalance (Samuelu, 1999; Ahdar (2013). What can be ascertained was tumultuous past which implications still resonate in the current relations one way or another (Tui'ai, 2012; Sila, 2012). This study was interested in exploring these past relations, trying also to understand the implications of these on the people's perception of power and relations in general for generations. Samuelu (1999)¹⁰¹ provided a glimpse of the church in village relations from a sociological perspective; Ahdar (2013) commented on the constitutional status of the church as not 'Christian' alluding to religious interrelations. Still the gap deserves more attention in fairness to the churches concerned. What can be offered in this study is a critical comment, based on the literature and data from 20 interviews.

First, churches, like all human institutions can only thrive on good human relationships. The early Christian Church faced own issues of power relations in the leadership,¹⁰² and among its members.¹⁰³ And especially when Christianity became a state religion and secular values set in to influence if not dominate the Christian narrative. Advocates such as Eulau strongly argued that power must be central to understanding church relations, even though this is hardly debated or talked about (Eulau, 1945).¹⁰⁴ Such power is very much fragmented for the Samoan church relations as the evidence strongly suggest.

The most contentious issue is the inception of new churches into villages. In 2002 the court ruled in favour of a group of villagers who wished to establish own church. The group has faced the wrath of the majority led coalition in the three mainline churches which do not want another church in their midst. Their properties were burnt, damaged, stolen, not to mention threats of violence, banishment and even murder (New Zealand Herald, Issue November 22, 2002). The case was reported around the world though this was not the only such case to come up where church snubbing is involved. Prior to that a similar case also involved the mainline churches which ended up with some people getting arrested, jailed, including a pregnant woman (Pacific Islands Report, 2000).

¹⁰¹ Samuelu (1999) study of the influence of the church in an urban village.

¹⁰² Ancient History Encyclopaedia. www.ancient.eu

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Eulau argued about the centrality of power in the Christian church discourse that was lacking in critical reflection.

They were condemned for contempt of court order not to practise their faith (bible study) in the village compound. The Supreme Court overturned the Land and Titles court decision three years later.¹⁰⁵

There were other similar cases but the two described here highlighted a very pressing issue that is very much at the core of Samoa's ongoing power relations contention: individual human rights as upheld by the constitution versus collective community rights espoused by the *faaSamoa*. Indeed, this struggle between the old guard and the newcomers is about self-preservation; the maintenance of the political status quo which has long served Samoa's collective interests; the new forces then were viewed as the enemy, a threat to the status quo long enjoyed by the community under organised religion (Ahdar, 2012). The gist of the argument presumably, is that many Samoans no longer need any further enlightenment on the Gospel. The space is getting too crowded; too close for comfort as one local Apian put it. These new churches, introduced from outside, are fundamentally different in culture, beliefs, and style from the traditional churches, he reasoned.

As noted earlier the *tapu* of the *va* has set church relations direction on a fixed course; the clergy is deferred to as the *pule* while the laity is the *tautua*. The influence of the *faiifeau/failotu* as described has become ever more a decisive factor, first within his own parish, second with other churches in the village. At the national level, it is the Samoan national council of churches which facilitates. The SNCC is very much under the control of the three mainline churches (Personal communication).¹⁰⁶ Apart from the Roman Catholic, both the Methodist and the Congregational (EFKS) have a centralised authority in their general assemblies, executive power is vested in the Committee of Elders Directors for EFKS, the office of the President for the Methodist.

In terms of gender, the women are part of the laity cohort, as deaconesses (EFKS) and lay preachers (Metotisi), or nuns in various Catholic orders. The three mainline churches may have to wait for a woman *faiifeau* for a long time. A number of denominations are implicated for discriminatory behaviours against transgenders and such marginalized groups of their congregations. P17 and P19 spoke out strongly on behalf of these groups.

¹⁰⁵ Country reports on human rights practices. Volume 2003, Issue 1. Online.

¹⁰⁶ Personal communication with three participants.

Traditionally, employment relations are not a strong part of the church narrative. From a democratic stance its workers are more vulnerable to the whim of the leadership. Of the three churches, the EFKS tends to have the most problems with power relations where the clergy is involved.¹⁰⁷ Either this may be due to the arbitrary nature of the governing body or the fact that the EFKS's government model encourages freedom, transparency, and democratic ideals. Without another power to appeal to, the grievant is pressured to seek justice with secular authority. Often the outcome does not bode well for the individual and the national church, not to mention the members who are directly caught in the struggle. For the other two, the rarity of any such case implies that either the governorship is fair and tolerant, or the coercive nature of power has proved to be an effective restraint. The global exposure of the issue of sexual abuse of children in the church, and the authority's role in covering it up for its workers lends credence to another dimension of vulnerability, that such behaviours are rampant in social spaces where symbolic power takes first seat over moral principles (Palmer, 2016).

The rest of the religious cohort emulate own mother churches that are based in Europe, the States, or the Middle East. For instance, the Samoa Latter-Day Saints is part of a global network that strictly adheres to organisation principles that are homogeneous worldwide. The tenure of the office of bishop (*epikopo*) is temporary and voluntary. The bearer funds for his own daily sustenance.

The moral dilemma on the part of the 'new churches' is in the choice of how much culture can be infused into its structures and practices, to be accepted as Samoan, and doing so without compromising own principles and Christian character. Otherwise, striving to be respectable in the Samoan context may not be too much of a compromise for its own sake. For some, the infusion of new practices in the form of social services for the less privileged lends support to the argument for a relook into the core of the Christian narrative, espoused locally, that according to observers within the system, has become clogged spiritually in the trappings of culture and materialism (Tui'ai, 2012; The Samoa Observer Editorial, 2019).¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Anecdotal evidence based on the frequency of media reporting where a denomination is directly involved in such matter in which the state court intervened, for the past twenty years.

¹⁰⁸ Samoa Observer Editorial, 2019. Issue 23/3/2019. What is it with the church and money these days? The leadership of some of these so-called new churches were accused of investing church money in controversial schemes such as Bitcoin, Onecoin etc with reports of losses in the end.

8.2.7 Church and State relations

The Samoan indigenous view of power puts religion in the centre of the political sphere; it can also be argued that from its religious stance, temporal power is inseparable from the realm of the supernatural. Such view lends legitimacy to the concepts of *tapu* and *mana* and thereby their effects on those who acquire them. Progenitor god Tangaroa and a host of heavenly deities were the main benefactors of the *mana* while the recipients were their earthly peers, in the form of *ariki* or earthly deities from which derived Samoans own, in the matai figure, endowed with *mana*, reinforced by *tapu* institutions (Tcherkezoff, 2000). Apart from a few (assumed to have been graced with more), the rest of the cohort were wielders of both temporal and sacred powers, in their capacity as leaders-priests on behalf of their families and communities.

The early Christian missionaries attested to the religious state of the Samoans as highly observant of their gods, which meaningful connections; for instance, the Christian's own idea of *mana* equated with Samoa's own, fared well in each own favours, making headways in getting to know each other's intentions (Turner, 1884). The success of institutionalized Christianity was in the political usurpation of the Tagaloa religion and family *tapua'iga* (Tuisugaletaua, 2011) in the battle of ideologies; leading to an even more accomplishing feat, a total reset of society, politically and socially (Meleisea, 1987; Wendt, 1996; Tui Atua, 2007; Maliko, 2012).

As noted earlier, with the inception of the *faiifeau* institution, a new paradigm shift in the relations of power ensued, with new *mana* and *tapu* to substitute for the old ones (Taule'ale'ausumai, 2018). The new outfit aligned with the inauguration of a new kind of political authority, a British parliamentary style democracy; a new political-religious model which has the king (governor) at the top; subordinated by the clerics on behalf of the church; and by the executive and parliament on behalf of the state, and finally the people making up a civil society (Meleisea, *ibid.*). As head of both church and state the king/queen savours both secular and sacred powers at once.¹⁰⁹

Similarly, the new Samoan political order has the head of state at the top¹¹⁰; the office is a representative symbol of unity of religion (church) and secular authority (state) at once. The clerics (*faiifeau*) leads the church; the matai leads the state. Both authorities

¹⁰⁹ In reference to the Anglican church model of governance.

¹¹⁰ The Head of State is the highest office of the State.

were meant to serve the same goal of unity under a shared religious dogma¹¹¹ which professed the sovereignty of the Christian God.¹¹² Both authorities were endowed with such *mana* to rule; by virtue of their shared dualistic heritage, under the auspices of the culture. As parts of one organism (society) or design, both were inclined naturally to cooperate in mutual relations. Which brings us to the current state of the relations between the government and the church. The political impasse between two authorities on the pastors' tax has posed the question of why the non-cooperation now. In other words, who defines the functions, demarcation, and policing of the boundary, if there was any - legal or imaginary - between the state and the church in the first place (Abdulla, 2018)?

More to the point, the question of separation. This has not been seriously explained at any time. While special privileges in terms of tax immunity have been granted to the village *fai'feau*, this was entrusted to the goodwill of the state authority for its upkeep and perpetuity. It was assumed on a common understanding it is the will of the people of Samoa. Then the HRPP government thought otherwise. Now the government is accused of snubbing church and the culture for that matter. What was *tapu* then in the power relations now is overruled by the law. Both sides have sought the counsel of the court. All the while they have been wrestling it out on theological grounds. Suffice to say that rights and wrongs of the argument are for the validation of the court. Nothing can be certain at this stage, a matter of wait and see. The point is, if there be any more misunderstanding about the state-church separation, it is now clarified in the impasse at hand. Which proves a point from the stance of critical theory, all relations by any name, can only be described as political (Foucault, 1981; Greenberg, 2000).

Thus, when the government was at the forefront of a constitutional change that clearly stated who God is (Trinitarian), the implication was obvious, the government has meddled with religion which is the prerogative of the church. When a call was heard for Islam to be banned in Samoa, the head of the Samoan Roman Catholics made his stance clear, that the state and the church are separated (CathNews New Zealand Pacifica, Issue June 3, 2016). If the motive was political, that is, to distance Samoa from Islamic fundamentalism, then it seemed its leadership is implicated by the same behaviour –

¹¹¹ A hybrid Samoan Christianity.

¹¹² In the nation's motto, Samoa is founded on God, in the preamble of the constitution.

advocates of Christian radical fundamentalism. A New Zealand based Samoan academic agreed that the motive was indeed political, that the mainline churches need to ‘protect their turf’ (RNZ Radio New Zealand News, Issue 19 May, 2016). And borne out of fear, the action could be deemed reasonable - even justifiable solely on the basis of a people’s self-preservation, physically and emotionally at least (ibid.).

One past incident I can recall personally; this was between the government of the day and the Methodist church. In 1976, the government asked the church for a purchase of a portion of its land (8 acres) at *Faleula*. The space was found to be highly suitable for the building of a telecommunication antenna. The problem was, this land (*Tauese-Avoka*) is *tapu* to the church, it is part of *Foga’a*; the church capital to say the least. The government, after exhausting all avenues of negotiations, then resorted to coercive tactics, threatening to force their way in, on the pretext the project is for the common good. The church leader at the time was adamant that no government official be allowed to enter the compound. On the morning assigned for the work, a large group of church members were up and waiting for the arrival of the government surveyors and police. They did not turn up. The matter was finally resolved the Samoan way. The prime minister at the time did concede that the church was right for holding fast to its ‘treasures’ (Milo, 1997). The church leader would not blame the government entirely but vented his frustration at a few personalities in the church who were playing politics (ibid.). Coming back to the current stalemate between the government and the EFKS, the latter has accused the government of breaching *tapu* and church protocols. In response, the government has returned the favour by blaming the EFKS leadership for meddling in secular politics (Samoa Observer, Issue June 24, 2018).

8.3 Media power and Samoan society

Which brings us to another type of power, the Media. The right to speak freely and confidently within a society of law and order has been the ultimate aspiration of every citizen, hence the rationale behind the role of the media.¹¹³ Where politics is involved such role in democratic societies finds its deeper meaning, whether in one's capacity to express an opinion through one of its many platforms, or the more serious such as its contribution in the checks and balances of a modern state. Generally described as platforms through which communication are passed from one person to another, or from one place to another, its application has become more sophisticated though far more accessible in today's technology. In traditional politics, the media is expected to stimulate citizen engagement for instance, whether in raising political awareness on the importance of electoral participation or rallying behind a political cause or campaign against a government policy (Lister et al., 2008). While other checks may be subjective or subtle, the independent media is by and large immanent and confronting (ibid.). The power of the word is hard to ignore by the authority and Samoa is no exception.

8.3.1 State of Samoa's media & communication

The development of the local media is described in a few reports which provided a public overview of its structure and basic functionality. One issued in 2013, entitled, Samoa: Media and Communication Report 2013 (Australian Aid, 2013). It provided a comprehensive account of its makeup, summed up under four areas namely: Policy and Legislation, Media Systems, Capacity Building, and Content. It was apparent from the report the leading role of the state in the appropriation of public information, from policy to its direction and implementation. There is work to be done but the infrastructure is very much in place, according to the report. On the one hand it showed Samoa's capacity for effective provision of the means of communication in the public interest. On the other hand, it implies the state of the environment where the place of an independent

¹¹³ The media can be divided into five major types, namely: traditional media, professional media, electronic media, social media and popular media. References to the media in this discussion is inclusive however, unless specifically stated. Traditional media refers to the role of newspapers, televisions, radios and magazines. Also referred to as the print media strictly speaking. Professional media refers specifically to the professional output in the form of research, books, films, scientific commentaries, which collective impact on power relations discourse is no less imposing. Electronic media revolves around the Internet and its platforms; radio and television can also be part of the repertoire. Social media refers to 'interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks.' The popular media employs traditional platforms such as oratory, singing, dancing, storytelling, poetry, drama, comedy, most of which are common throughout the world's cultures. All or most of these platforms are interconnected in terms of serving any particular message or narrative, in this study, Samoa's political discourse. See Chandler & Munday (2011); Wikipedia. Media.

media is very much tied to political authority (Siebert, 1995).¹¹⁴ From that standpoint, an alternative interface is provided by the independent media to respond the best way it could (Malifa, 2010; Toleafoa, 2013). For my purpose, I wish to comment briefly and strictly on the political impact of the latter in the current state of Samoa's power relations.

8.3.2 The role of critical media in the context of power relations

In commenting I wish to adopt the critical media theoretical framework, which Ott & Mack (2020, p. 1) described as 'an attempt to describe an array of theoretical perspectives that, though diverse, are united by their sceptical attitude, humanistic approach, political assessment, and commitment to social justice.'

First, the sceptical attitude refers to a basic norm in critical news making by which the media does own observation. Ricoeur (1970) used the term 'hermeneutics of suspicion.' He described hermeneutics as a mode of interpretation grounded in close analysis which implication is deep distrust of surface appearances and common-sense explanations (cited in Ott & Mack, *Ibid.*). Secondly, the humanistic approach, by which the media is associated with a particular set of intellectual concerns that influence our approach to the social world and our place in it. Much of those concerns revolve around two concepts - human freedom and social responsibility; or in other terms, the contribution that the intellectual can make to the welfare of society (Said, 2012). Critical media hence will approach knowledge from the perspective of humanities first and foremost.¹¹⁵

Thirdly, the assessment of any information output by critical media is by and large political. Critical media is interested in the question of whose interests are served by the media; as well, whose interests contribute to the domination, exploitation, and asymmetrical relations of power (Ott & Mack, *ibid.*) Its view of society is premised on power; hence a community is a complex network of interrelated power relations in which certain individuals and groups benefit materially over others (*ibid.*). The basic aim of critical

¹¹⁴ The press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structure within which it operates – Siebert.

¹¹⁵ "Edward Said addresses the ways in which the intellectual can best serve society in the light of a heavily compromised media and of special interest groups who are protected at the cost of larger community concerns. Said suggests a recasting of the intellectual's vision to resist the lures of power, money, and specialization".

theory is to evaluate the role of media in this interplay of power relations (Marcano, 2018).

Finally, critical media looks at humans striving for social justice as the driving ambition behind the role of an independent media in society. This is borne out of a natural desire for improvement of our social world (ibid.). Such a media owes it to own society a moral responsibility, that is, to identify political injustices, and have the courage to confront and challenge them. These may be repressive systems in the rule of capital, patriarchy, oligarchy, racism, sexism, nationalism, for example (Fuchs, 2010). It is the media which gives the voice to the voiceless, posing the hard questions on their behalf. The media empowers the powerless, rallying the people to a moral cause, etc. (ibid.). This is easier said than done though. Some societies have far more appreciation of the media's role than others who may be corrupt, hostile or simply indifferent. Whichever way, the role of the independent media is always compromised due to the political aspect involved. I will extend on this argument shortly. To reiterate a point, it is common knowledge that the most pressing type of challenge to the media and its role is political. Now these are my observations:

8.3.3 Some personal observations

First, the independent media has contributed hugely to Samoa's political development. Such claim is self-evident. First and foremost, its role as the government's watchdog on behalf of the people. Since the colonial heydays to the post-Independence era, there was always a representative or two. There was the Samoa Guardian against the New Zealand colonial establishment. During the sixties and seventies, the Samoa Times, since then the Samoa Observer and a good number of Samoan language newspapers that carried the mantle forward.¹¹⁶ For the past forty years, the name Samoa Observer is synonymous with the role.¹¹⁷ Since its launching in 1979, the newspaper has reported and commented continuously on government policy, decisions, behaviour, performance as the alternative recorder. Such an undertaking is not to be taken lightly by the political authority. A law was passed in 1992, called Printers and Publishers Act

¹¹⁶ The current status of Samoan newspapers continues to decline in terms of numbers in the past 20 years; out of six that served New Zealand readers in the past decade; the last one standing, Samoa Times, was closed recently due to Covid-19.

¹¹⁷ Government watchdog.

1992, which called for publishers to reveal the sources of any leaked government documents they publish. Now with a critical media that is prone to political lawsuits, for reasons such as defamation, the limitations on what the press must or must not say is an issue not just for good governance but media accountability. Hard questions have been asked, the price paid for doing so (Malifa, 2010)¹¹⁸; yet misunderstanding of its role remains. This role has become ever more self-clarified, such as this point in time, when the voice of opposition in parliament is muted for reasons stated already (ibid.).

Secondly, the role of critical media is anathema to culture. Savea Malifa, founder of the Samoa Observer, in his address of the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day Conference in Brisbane, traced the development of its network's relationship with the government. For instance, expensive lawsuits levelled at the newspaper demonstrated the reality of unequal power relations in emerging democracies. Which points us to the prevailing political ideology. Samoa's own is predominantly cultural. It is the domain of the *faa-matai*, embodied in the figure of a matai whose authority individually and collectively is unchallenged. The Samoan culture has no room for criticism of authority, especially by the *tautua*. Malifa, a matai of note himself, pointed this out. But he was a matai of a different mould, the majority of his peers were happy to go with the old script.

The irony could not be more telling, with the appropriation of power under parliamentary democracy, one of its vital institutions is still yet to find its place, for reasons as noted. Malifa (2010) would have wished that with the inauguration of democracy in 1962 then suddenly 'everything changed.' The new values will have been superimposed and taken hold and the transition smooth as anticipated, but experience has proved otherwise; he too was very much aware of the nature of Samoa's political environment (ibid.). One research participant argued it is the *faaSamoa* that needs more appreciation. He was referring to the foreign journalists whose forthright manner of investigative journalism, by his personal judgement, lacked cultural finesse (Personal communication).¹¹⁹ Thirdly, a change of perception of the role of media can only come with a strong prevailing sense of political awareness among a larger portion of the populace. There is a point in the argument that a country's media is only as effective politically as the

¹¹⁸ Malifa (2010). Presented a paper in the UNESCO Press Freedom Day on the theme the press in Samoa is not free. The content of which included an account of the human cost to him, family and business for speaking up.

¹¹⁹ His comment was made in support of Samoa's prime minister which awkward encounters with foreign journalists; first New Zealand's John Campbell, secondly with British Brian Deer, made world headlines.

common voters whom it represents (Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010). The question of why the average voter needs the service of an independent media and vice versa is pivotal in understanding a country's own power relations. The basic demands of a democracy on their citizens revolve around a common assumption that they are first and foremost politically literate, meaning, that they have the capacity to vote rationally, express themselves freely and even influence the political sphere by their vote for the better (*ibid.*). This is where the media plays its role. Political theorists talk about the other aspect of the media's role as educator (*ibid.*).

It comes back to this; any talk about politics is *tapu*; a preserve of the matai regime only. It is considered unbecoming of the servers and the children (*tautua ma le tinifu*) to delve into this realm and be part of the conversation. As such, the ruling regime, as part of the matai cohort has a reason to hesitate. But everyone knows that the answer lies in the task of a good rationalization programme, a proactive national promotion of political awareness among the population. Interestingly, it is government that is pro-active in promoting political awareness on its own terms; the independent media could not compete with the resources it has. There is then always an uneven sharing of information, with the absence of input by the independent media, or the opposition for that matter, for balance. The government is viewed as being successful by it taking the people with them, understandably with own monopoly of the public media.

Perhaps one of the weaknesses of the independent media in this respect is to do with the most vital tools in any form of communication, the languages. While government makes full use of Samoa's bilingual utility, the independent media has limited its potential to one medium mainly. Language is power and most of the voters are not attuned as much to politics daily grind, because of the language barrier. Access to financial resources is a factor, implying that Samoa's independent media will find it hard to take the people along with them; or sustain on their own without the moral support of the majority, at least vocal and visible, something that is taken for granted by such media as New Zealand's for example. So, while its impact is self-evident, its full potential will always be thwarted by the factors as mentioned.

Fourthly, what traditional media could not do for fear of reprisal, social media can. From a research perspective, this has provided some fresh opportunities, particularly on this

aspect of media development not yet explored within small emerging democracies. From a political stance, social media provides a secure environment for the majority to express their views freely. The risk of doing so compared to traditional media is much less. With that in mind, some have taken it to government head on, even if it means breaking all the rules, social courtesy reserved for a while. For example, the concern on its long-term implication for the language and culture of ‘*va tapuia*’ on the young and future generations is real (Tavita, 2018).

For the agitators, the message is clear, there are issues that are far more at stake than language and cultural concerns. The government has not much answer to the new challenge, if only a public display of outrage and promise to bring the culprits to justice. Unless of course, individuals like ‘King Faipopo’¹²⁰ have the audacity to confront government openly; a strategy others will not prefer; they will continue to censure government activity in the way they know better. Rightly or wrongly, the unavoidable question to the debate is, what potential social media has for the cause of effecting changes in Samoan politics? How can this be mobilized for both political and social changes?

Finally, I imagine that it will be much harder for Samoa’s independent media to compromise its hard-earned reputation for a life of political conformity suddenly. In the contribution of a few individuals, with the Samoa Observer taking the lead, Samoa’s independent media is playing its role in spite of the challenges. While not enjoying the full support of a reticent populace, reassurances from the world media authorities have legitimized its contribution in Samoa’s democracy already anyway.

The rationale of sustaining a free flow of information is bound to natural justice. In good government, an independent media is an integral part of the system; as the adage put it, the heartbeat of a democracy. How this should be realized ultimately in Samoa’s own democracy, or at least respected by its opponents as essential in a healthy democracy, is a matter of wait and see. Perhaps in the power of the political will, or by education in the long run. Common sense is the most basic measure of any democratic rationale, and in a situation where opposition in parliament is almost non-existent, it is the media, with the people, that provides a sense of balance on behalf of such vacuum (Rosenfeld, 2014).

¹²⁰ The name by which an antigovernment blogger is known.

8.4 Political pressure groups & NGOs

Political pressure groups like the media are foreign institutions, both share the same types of challenges due to their foreignness and lack of political clout within society. It is even harder to identify one, apart from a latest overseas based group called the Samoa Solidarity International Group (SSIG), which sole aim is to put pressure on the government to repeal a law, which they believe breached the rights of the Samoan people pertaining to their lands. The group has stirred a bit of commotion in Samoa's political sphere, due mainly to the high-level interest of the subject. On the strength of the issue itself a new political party, called *Samoa First*, is launched, using it as its singular mandate in the coming 2021 elections. The SSIG relies mainly on the social media for its business as well as in canvassing support for the new political party.

The only other groups who sort of fit the role of political agitator were the Samoa Trade Union Congress (STUC) and the Samoa Public Service Association (SPSA). The latter displayed such a role during the noted 1981 strike. Since then, the reality could have been any different (Ah Chong-Fruean, 2010). With the change in the rules, now they have very little influence on employment decision at both national even organisational levels, to pose a challenge on the authority. With the promotion of the idea of a benevolent society, the overriding sentiment among workers is to maintain this image of Samoa as peaceful and quiet (ibid.). It is in the nature of the *faaSamoa* to tend to relations first and foremost and resolve human conflicts by peaceful means. For all these reasons, it is highly unlikely that Samoa will be turned quickly into a unionised society, Ah Chong-Fruean concluded.

Other groups attempt to remain neutral if not political by association. First, the *National Council of Women*, established in 1953 as a forum to express the women's opinion. While it has political clout through promotion of culture its impact is very much diffused. Through mutual collaboration with the state, it has served the interests of women and families at many levels. Another one, the *Samoan Umbrella for NGOs* (SUNGO) was established in 1997 to lend support to the vulnerable groups as well as implement government policy for achieving such purpose (UN Volunteer). Together the NGOs, alongside government, have provided for Samoa's development needs in a variety of services which include health, the environment, natural disaster relief, women and children's rights, even pastoral care (ibid.). The Oxfam, Caritas and Rotary,

representing the international forum, have made own presence felt already. Not in the political sphere though.

Finally, the *O le Si'osi'omaga Society* (OLSSI) as the name suggests takes the environment as its purpose of service. It has become more political in the past decade, leading the debate on customary land issues where government policy is strongly implicated. As a member of SUNGO it also has clout at the regional level having own representative to voice Pacific civil society organisations at the Global Environment Facility. The OLSSI is perhaps the most vocal opposition of the government on the leasing out of customary land under the 2008 Act.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter looked at the composition of Samoa's local government power relations in the context of the village polity. The village has been the space of traditional government or *faamatai*, that is now shared with the church. A detailed overview and analysis of each was given to provide a close look at the intricacies of power relations or the dynamics involved in each organisation ruling and hierarchy. As noted, I made a distinction between local government and civil society simply to highlight the two forms of government which share the same space. The demarcation is largely symbolic since both governments are interrelated at many levels. In the discussion, I reiterated the point that the key to unravelling the complexity of Samoa's power relations at work is at the village level and its governments. First, the dynamics, the diverse networks of relationships where two authorities are both active in the same space. In many villages it is the church that has become more assertive politically.

Overall, all sectors of society are impacted directly and indirectly by the influence of the two governments – matai council and church – as well as other institutions of power such as the media, even the NGOs. Their interaction along with state institutions, and other forces of relations have moulded the public's perception of power, as this research attempted to find out. In other words, a contemporary Samoan village is not what it looks like due to the symbolic nature of power. Symbolically, power has shifted gradually to the church leadership and hierarchy as it becomes more diffused. Thus, the argument that the analysis of power and its relations in a modern Samoan village needs to be based on this understanding. The state involvement through the government's programmes can only diversify power relations, providing some forms of checks on church power at least, by empowering the village matai council.

In the next chapter, the attention will be on the people's perception finally. In the views of twenty participants, the analysis will attempt to make connections between the research problem, the theory and the people's perception on power through their lived experience.