

“SAILI LE TOFA: A SEARCH FOR NEW WISDOM”
SEXUALITY AND *FA’AFAFINE* IN THE SAMOAN CONTEXT

by
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“In Samoa, a fafine is a woman, a tane is a man or husband, and a fa’afafine is a man who lives as a woman. In the English Bible, Leviticus 18:22, it is written, “Thou shalt not lie down with mankind, as with womankind; it is an abomination.” In the Samoan Tusi Pa’ia, Levitiko 18:22, it is written, “Aua lua te momoe ma se tane, e pei ona momoe ma se fafine; o le ea e inosia lava lea.” Thus it is written that a tane cannot sleep with a tane, but it is not written that a tane cannot sleep with a fa’afafine.”

–Dan Taulapapa McMullin (*Fa’afafine* Notes: On Tagaloa, Jesus, and Nafanua)

Contents

Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter ONE: OVERVIEW	1
Introduction.....	1
Objective.....	2
Method.....	4
Chapter TWO: SOURCES OF FAITH: A SAMOAN EXPLORATION	6
i. A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS.....	6
Getting Past the “ <i>Sin-Drome</i> ”	11
Samoa Theological Perspectives.....	19
<i>Tofa Saili</i> and <i>Tofa Liliu</i>	21
Understanding the <i>Va-Samoa</i>	23
ii. THE MISSIONARY/COLONIAL ERA.....	26
Sexuality and Colonialism.....	27
Sexuality: From Public to Private.....	29
Chapter THREE: FA’AFAFINE IN SAMOAN CONTEXTS	34
i. FA’A SAMOA AND FA’AFAFINE: AN EXPLORATION.....	34
ii. CULTURAL ACCEPCANCE AND BELONGING.....	39
Samoa Church.....	40
Samoa Society.....	42
Chapter FOUR: RESULTS	46
i. FA’AFAFINE VOICES.....	46
Chapter FIVE: CONCLUSION	58
Key Implications.....	58
Moving Forward.....	60
BIBLIOGRAPHY	63
APPENDICES	68
Appendix I: Consent Form	68
Appendix II: Interview Questions	73
Appendix III: Glossary	74

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW

Introduction

Christianity made its way to Samoa¹ from a foreign land. The people welcomed the *papalagi*² as friends from beyond the horizon. Their words were strange; they were completely clothed with shiny objects hanging from their waists. The *papalagi* even had “clothes upon his feet,” as one chief described.³ It was a time of great unrest in Samoa as wars between ruling families left countless grieving widows and fatherless children behind in its destructive path. The *papalagi* brought more than their shiny tools and strange words, they were accompanied by a friend of the Samoan people, one of their own by the name of Fauea. Fauea mediated the interaction between the *papalagi* teachers, or missionaries as they referred to themselves, and Samoan chiefs. He told the chiefs that the missionaries came on a praying ship, and their message was one of peace. After enduring years of war, the people of Samoa, according to missionary accounts, exuberantly welcomed this new way of peace. It was 1830, and Christianity had arrived in Samoa. However, contrary to popular opinion, it is true that the gospel did make its way to Samoa on *papalagi* praying ships, but it was not the *papalagi* words that Christianized them. They were Samoan words, from a Samoan clergy. Indeed, it was Fauea who translated their words. Since then, Samoan people have synthesized Christian practice and spirituality into

¹ Throughout the remainder of this study Samoa will be used in reference to both the US territory of Samoa and the independent country of Samoa. The cultural, religious, and social norms of both contexts are practically identical with the only difference being their systems of self-governance. Samoa is still one people divided in two as a result of colonialism.

² White or European man/woman.

³ James J. Ellis, *John Williams: The Martyr Missionary of Polynesia*, PDF, Los Angeles: UCLA.

the Samoan way, or *fa'a Samoa*.⁴ As a result, a new saying was birthed: *E auva'alualua le tala lelei ma le aganu'u*, which means, Christianity and Samoan culture occupy the same boat/canoe as one journeys through life. Personally, the saying is a theological statement that represents the inclusiveness of the Samoan culture and Christian faith.

However, from my own experience as a Samoan theologian and clergy member, inclusiveness has varying definitions in religious and cultural settings in Samoa. As a member of the clergy, I have a responsibility to all people of God. This responsibility stretches beyond being a mere passive source of spiritual care and counseling. In addition, it should embolden the role of clergy to be visionaries that look beyond the horizon; deeper into the experiences of God's people, distinguishing between sources of joy and pain. As I understand it, to love and care for people, and every living organism is the foundation of *fa'a Samoa* and the Christian faith. As a Samoan clergy member in constant search of God's wisdom for people today, two probing questions are fundamental to this study: 1) Is the Samoan culture and faith inclusive of people regardless of gender, and sexuality? And 2) what does that inclusivity look like through the lens of social justice?

Objective

I have been a member of the Congregational church in Samoa for all of my life, and now I serve the church as a third generation clergy member. My grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts, have, and continue to serve as leaders of the church; a tradition of faith that my family is very proud of. My mother transitioned from this life while I was a first year seminary student in

⁴ Literally the Samoan way of life/way of doing things. The term refers to the Samoan culture, norms and customs, values and morals, theology and ethics. It is the foundation of Samoa that sustains its people, culture, and religious identity.

American Samoa. In life, she was a constant advocate for the rights of the marginalized in her family, church, and Samoan culture. God works through people, and those people come and go as time gets the best of us. But they leave something behind. My mother left her spirit of justice, love, and compassion; she left her voice. But it was a voice that never fully belonged to her during her thirty years of ministry. It always belonged to others—the voiceless, and this has been the model through which my own ministry continues to be shaped. It’s a ministry driven by justice and love; saying what people are thinking and feeling, but cannot express because they have not yet received the language to articulate their innermost thoughts and feelings. Yet, as we listen with more compassion; with more love; through the lens of justice, it is they, the poor, the outcast, the disenfranchised who give us much more in return.

As a clergy member and theologian of the Samoan church I have been given a platform to address the people from a position of authority. While this position of leadership comes with special privileges within the Samoan church and culture, I choose to privilege the needs and concerns of the marginalized. In the Samoan church, Christian principles of love, compassion, and justice for the neighbor and those on the margins continue to be preached on Sunday. However, is this message inclusive of Samoa’s *fa’afafine*⁵ community, also referred to as third gender? As a member of the clergy, I have witnessed the service of the *fa’afafine* community within Samoan churches and culture. I have seen first-hand how *fa’afafine* privilege, in various ways, the needs of others before their own. Leadership within the institutions of Samoan church

⁵ The term *fa’afafine* is used throughout this study. Here, it refers to effeminate males in the Samoan context, or, transgender/gay/bisexual/queer. The literal interpretation of *fa’afafine* is “in the manner/ways of a woman.” However, I would like to acknowledge the experiences of *fa’afatama*, literally “in the manner/ways of a man,” (lesbian/transgender/gay/queer). In an effort to concentrate on the specificities of one marginalized group, and although this study speaks to their experiences as well, an in depth analysis of *fa’afatama* has not been included in this study. It is my belief that the experiences of *fa’afatama* cannot/should not be inserted into a study of *fa’afafine* as the particularities of their experiences—in my opinion—deserves its own independent study as *fa’afatama* experiences differ immensely from *fa’afafine*.

and culture also support this claim. Still, the distinction between *acceptance* and *justice* for *fa'afafine* has yet to be clearly defined.

Thus, the purpose of this study *is not* to undermine the foundational theology of the Samoan church and core values of *fa'a Samoa*. Rather, my intention is to bring awareness to some aspects of Samoan society that merit special attention today. Specifically, the study focuses on sexuality in Samoa through the lens of social justice. The voices of the *fa'afafine* community are highlighted to understand the tension between Samoan church and culture, and sexuality. It is the contention of this study that the experiences and agency of *fa'afafine* in Samoan culture and church can provide the groundwork for a more affirming ethic of sexuality.

In what follows, we will partake on a journey of Samoa's sexual norms and *fa'afafine* with much emphasis on the culture and Christian institutions. My intent is for church, government, and cultural leadership to embrace a more collective responsibility in solidarity with *fa'afafine*; a solidarity that is in accordance with their basic human, Christian, and cultural rights. In exchange, I hope people will become more informed of the many ways *fa'afafine* are, and have always been, in solidarity with all people of Samoa, regardless of gender and sexual preference.

Method

The study is a theological and cultural analysis of sexuality and *fa'afafine* in the Samoan context. Structurally, chapter two explores faith and theological discourse; chapter three looks at *fa'afafine* in the Samoan context; and chapter four explores the lived experience of *fa'afafine*.

The theological perspective of the Samoan church⁶ is discussed by probing the current discourse

⁶ The use of "Samoan church" in this study refers to my own experience in the Congregational Church of American Samoa (CCCAS, EFKAS). The term also addresses the Congregational Church of Samoa (CCCS, EFKS)

as it relates to Samoan sexual norms, customs, and wisdom. Furthermore, the study focuses on sexuality, and sexual discourse on *fa'afafine* from a theological perspective, and it is mainly situated within the Samoan context. The research consisted of many documentary viewings, conversations, email correspondences, and personal visits. My own personal experience as a Samoan, a clergy member of the church, and my relational bonds with many of the *fa'afafine* community who are family members informed this study as well. This perspective was critical in understanding many of the complexities of Samoan church as it relates to the overall structure of the church and how *fa'afafine* exist within Samoan church spaces. Many of the literature selected were primary and secondary sources that had relevance to the theological motifs of the study. Although there are numerous anthropological and sociological studies by western researchers relating to *fa'afafine* in Samoa, the majority of the literature used herein addressed *fa'afafine* within a theological context, and were either Pacific or Samoan authors. These authors were invaluable resources that aided in understanding many of the indigenous and Samoan cultural motifs throughout the study. Lastly, interviews were conducted to highlight the voices of *fa'afafine*. The testimonies consisted of 5 questions whereby the following issues were discussed: 1) personal analysis of Samoan church; 2) experience/community; 3) Religion/Government position on *faafafine*; 4) Social Justice; and 5) Spirituality. For fear of reprimand, the identities of all the participants remains anonymous. Thus, with these sources, authors, and stories, let us begin our journey. *Tatou folau fa'atasi* (let us journey together).

whereby the CCCAS derives from. However, "Samoan church" can also refer to the Catholic, Methodist, and other traditions of Christianity in Samoa.

CHAPTER TWO

SOURCES OF FAITH: A SAMOAN EXPLORATION

i. A THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

In this initial section of the chapter I highlight why theology is paramount to the principal goal of this study. First, there is no single way of defining theology. Traditionally, theology, or *theologia* from the Greek root, has been referred to as “the study of God.” Plato, in *The Republic*, referred to it as “discourse on God.”⁷ Augustine defined it as “reasoning or discussion concerning the Deity”⁸ But what does it mean in today’s context? The question is quite relevant given the fact that after I explain to many what my concentration in grad school is, they usually follow-up with questions like: “What’s theology? You mean you actually study God?” I usually respond to them by explaining that it’s a little more complicated than that. However, the kernel of any definition of theology is the context where it takes place, and the experience of the people it speaks to.

Thus, within a Samoan context theology is a reflection of the Samoan people, created in the bosom of the living *feagaiganu’u*/community. Addressing conflicts and ambiguities within the community is largely the work of “doing theology.” A theology centered on the people embraces their hopes, desires, and joys. It is an attempt to get to know God by lifting up the despair, sorrow, and pain of the community. God-talk varies in different contexts, but it is always a response to a pre-existing idea or theological claim. For example, Karl Barth’s dialectical theology was a response to pre-existing claims. Barth’s aim was to re-centralize God during the

⁷ Plato, *The Republic*: Book ii, Ch. 18, PDF, Los Angeles: UCLA.

⁸ James Wetzel, ed., *Augustine's City of God: A critical guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), PDF.

rise of Nazism, and his main argument was that liberals had abandoned God in search of self-glorification.⁹ In Native American traditions, their opposition to colonial Christian narratives gave voice to theologians like Vine DeLoria Jr. who proclaimed “God is Red.”¹⁰ The struggle for “preferential treatment of the poor” in Latin America through the works of Liberation theologians Gustavo Gutiérrez, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, and Jon Sobrino was a response to the Catholic church. Met with strong opposition from the Vatican, many of them were eventually silenced.¹¹ Black Theology in America shook the foundations of white Christianity as James Cone argued that “suffering did not have the last say,” and highlighted the Cross as central to the Christian faith for blacks who had a long history of slavery and lynching.¹²

Against great odds, the theologians above questioned the contradictions in the established theologies of their time. In addition to their theological professions, most of them were also pastors, and priests of the faith. In the Samoan context, being in community with God is the cornerstone of Samoan faith. Still, there are contradictions yet to be addressed between the theology of the church and the communitarian values of Samoan culture. Christianity’s creedal

⁹ Arguably the most influential theologian of the 20th century. Barth’s dialectical theology shook the theological world and demanded that Christian scholars and believers relinquish their firm grasp on an intellectual idolatry that created a wedge between Creator and created. However, though influential in providing a new foundation for future theological scholarship, it failed to address the social disparities outside of Europe. Still, Barth’s God-centered neo-orthodox theology remains a key turning point in the history of Christian theological discourse. For central themes in Barth’s life work see David Mueller’s *Karl Barth* in the series *Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2016).

¹⁰ See Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1973); George “Tink” Tinker, *Missionary conquest: The Gospel and Native American cultural genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

¹¹ See Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973); Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the liberator: a historical-theological reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993); Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Liberation theology: from dialogue to confrontation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986); For context on liberation theology in Latin America in relation to the Catholic church see Matthew L. Lamb and Matthew Levering editors, *Vatican II : renewal within tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹² James Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power 3rd ed.* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997); James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2011).

and doctrinal traditions can be problematized in such a way. The dualistic nature of these doctrines exclude certain members of the Samoan community from expressing their full “Samoan-ness.”¹³ In relation to sexuality, dualisms in the Christian tradition introduced by Thomas Aquinas were shaped by ethical and moral arguments based on *natural law theory*.

Laurel C. Schneider explains:

Although natural law theory can be traced to the decidedly pagan Aristotle, it was Thomas Aquinas in the medieval synthesis who interpreted natural law into Christian theology, giving to Christians this most powerful and enduring juridical tool for separating the sheep from the goats, so to speak.¹⁴

This suggests that the *natural* and *un-natural* in Christian discourse today was heavily influenced by European philosophical and theological assertions far removed from the experiences of Pacific people. In Samoa, this framework regulates the narrative of sexuality to this day. The same can be said of other Pacific islands like Aotearoa/New Zealand. As Clive Aspin explains, “.... the arrival of Christian missionaries in Aotearoa/New Zealand led to the imposition of a code of behavior that was based on Victorian concepts of morality.”¹⁵ Furthermore, he asks, “To what extent is our sexuality today influenced by the colonial past?”¹⁶ The question is also pertinent to current theological discourses on sexuality in Samoa. To rephrase Aspin’s question, Samoan people should ask: To what extent is our sexuality today

¹³ The term refers to the identity of Samoan people that views the individual primarily as Samoan first, without consulting one’s religious ethical and moral codes. Samoan-ness means being at home, equally Samoan without social, economic, political, or religious bias.

¹⁴ Laurel C. Schneider, “What if it is a choice? Some implications of the Homosexuality Debates for theology” in *Sexuality and the Sacred* ed. Marvin Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas 2nd Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 200.

¹⁵ Qwo-Li Driskill, *Queer indigenous studies: critical interventions in theory, politics, and literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011), 115.

¹⁶ Ibid.

influenced by our Christian past, or better yet, Aquinas's *natural law theory*? In his defense, Aquinas could not have imagined the impact his synthesizing of Aristotelian philosophy with Christian principles would have on non-European societies. Thus, for Schneider, "the argument from nature is not essential to Christian theology.... it ultimately gets us into an endless, self-referencing loop of coercive sameness."¹⁷ This fusing together of *natural law theory* and Christian teaching had lasting effects on Samoan people. Thinking outside of the European view of the world implied—for missionaries—that native people were also intellectually incapable of reasoning and had to be taught self-control first and foremost. Christian teaching became synonymous with discipline to the point where the latter became the dominant narrative of how Samoans interpreted *right Christianity*. As R.P. Gilson notes, controlling the overall conduct of Samoan people became part of theological discourse:

It followed, by London Missionary Society logic, that people who had undeveloped minds must also be undisciplined in their emotions. On two counts, then, it was feared that many Samoans might be incapable of cultivating the means of grace, being deficient in the powers of reason and self-control essential to a state of piety and morality. That is not to say that missionaries responded by simplifying their theological discourses, but they did shift the emphasis of their role from that of teacher towards that of father or policeman, concerning themselves less with what the masses understood of Christianity and more with overt conduct.¹⁸

Therefore, since the arrival of Christianity Samoan people have habituated self-discipline into their own perceptions of what God desires of them. Thinking, feeling, wanting, and knowing outside of the established Christian theological discourse is considered heretical, especially if a theological teaching poses a threat to the overall structure and norms of the church. Needless to say, such views limit the theological sensibilities of Samoan people, and deprive Samoans of the

¹⁷ Schneider, 200.

¹⁸ R.P. Gilson, *Samoa 1830-1900: The Politics of Multi-Cultural Community* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1970), 75-94.

moral and ethical life lessons yet to be achieved from deeper understandings of human diversity and the Divine.

Can God continue to be God without Christian creeds and doctrines? Of course, this is a very complicated question. Asking people to re-consider the tenets of their Christian identity requires a re-considering of current notions of sacredness, liturgies, and their identities as people of faith. Two hundred years of Christian indoctrination has made it very difficult for Samoan people to even consider the idea. It is not, however, impossible. If, according to Cone, it is true that “theology is shaped by what it denies and rejects,” then a more relational Christian theology in Samoa must also include its pre-Christian norms as viable theological sources. These include rituals, ceremonies, myths, and legends from which wisdom sayings still used today derive from.¹⁹ The wisdom saying mentioned earlier, “*E au ’va ’alualua le aganu ’u ma le tala lelei,*” means the Samoan culture and gospel occupy the same canoe as they journey together. However, those whose sexual preferences are at the periphery are having to find their way into the canoe while others with *natural relationships*²⁰ have a much safer position under the current status quo. What use is a theological claim if some are safe while others are at risk? Addressing this question requires a deeper understanding of the indoctrinated tenets of Christianity that have shaped Samoan views of proper and improper dialogue and actions concerning sexuality.

¹⁹ James Cone, "Black Liberation Theology" (lecture, Systematic Theology 103, Union Theological Seminary, New York, November 10, 2015).

²⁰ Natural relationships are defined by the Samoan church as heterosexual bonds, the binary of male and female.

Getting Past The “Sin-Drome”

Exploring a more inclusive theology in Samoa without fully exploring pre-existing claims that govern the life of the church and people is ineffective. Thus, one must ask: Why is sex-talk so *tapu*,²¹ or taboo in Samoa? When thinking about sexuality, why is it that many people think of perversion? The point is, our instinctive reactions to certain issues in society are the result of being exposed to dominating narratives of interpretation, *normalizing* one specific way. For the people of Samoa, denouncing sin is also a denouncement/abandonment of who they were prior to European influence.²² The use of the phrase *Sin-drome* is a play on words of the term *syndrome*. Here, the term refers to its use as inherited disorders pathogenically linked to a specific source that can identify the current state as either *acute*, *chronic*, or *recurrent*.²³ Thus, many Samoans today suffer from either acute, chronic, or recurrent cases of *Sin-drome*, ranging from mild to severe. As with any medical condition, identifying the source of the condition can make the difference between life and death. Locating sources of theology that are spiritually harmful to the Christian faith can make the difference between a theology that is life affirming and life negating. Metaphors aside, moving beyond the *Sin-drome* means to identify the unreasonable differences between European norms introduced by missionaries that claim authority over the lived cultural experiences of Samoan people.

²¹ Literally, taboo. Meaning sacred, protected, forbidden, restricted.

²² The London Missionary Society journals of John Williams and George Turner document many instances where Samoan people denounced their previous ritual practices and spirits pledging their devotion to the new religion of missionaries. See John Williams, ‘The Samoan Journals of John Williams 1830 and 1832,’ ed. Richard M. Moyle (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1984); George Turner, *Samoa, A Hundred Years Ago and Long Before* (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies University of the South Pacific, 1984).

²³ These terms are typically used in the fields of Clinical Psychology, Psychiatry, and Medicine. The terms are used symbolically to emphasize varying gradations of how interpretations of *Sin* are acquired, and or interpreted.

The term sin has often been defined in legal terms by interpreters of biblical texts. Karl Barth described it as “a privation of good as opposed to being part of God’s created order,” which builds upon the traditional/legal model of sin defined as a violation of God’s laws or commands.²⁴ However, the discourse on sexuality, specifically Queer theology, have modified many of these traditional models in relation to the experience of LGBTQ people. Something Barth would have likely rejected—that is, the experience of LGBTQ people as Patrick Cheng states.²⁵ Cheng, in his essay *Rethinking Sin and Grace for LGBT People Today*, builds upon Barth’s threefold Christological model of sin and grace and provides his own models in relation to the experiences of LGBT people, and what sin and grace mean to them. Cheng states:

LGBT Christians must continue to wrestle deeply with the theological doctrines of sin and grace. Because LGBT people have been hurt by the traditional legal model of sin and grace, I believe that these doctrines should be rethought in Christological terms such as the Erotic Christ, the Out Christ, the Transgressive Christ, and the Hybrid Christ. My hope is that a Christological model of sin and grace will allow LGBT people of faith to enter into a more meaningful theological dialogue among ourselves, as well as the broader theological community as we enter into the third millennium of the Christian tradition.²⁶

Previously mentioned, sexual relations that violate God’s command are defined as a violation of the laws of nature. French philosopher Michel Foucault identified these violations of law in three categories that governed sexual practices up to the end of the eighteenth century: Canonical law; the Christian pastoral; and civil law, each determining in its own way the difference between licit and illicit.²⁷ However, the issue of marriage was the most intense focus

²⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G.W. Bromley and T.F. Torrance, trans G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), IV/1: 139-42.

²⁵ Patrick Cheng, “Rethinking Sin and Grace for LGBT People Today” in *Sexuality and the Sacred* ed. Marvin Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas 2nd Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 107.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

of constraints because all three of these categories centered on matrimonial relations. In other words, a covenantal, spiritual, and legal marriage presumed right/natural sexual relationships. Deviants of this system were considered sinful and unlawful. The most abhorrent form of deviation was homosexuality. Considered a vice in normative sexual behavior, Foucault argued that the act of sodomy quickly became the sin of homosexuality as it was “a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and feminine in oneself.”²⁸ Furthermore, it became a form of sexuality “when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul.”²⁹ The temporary act of sodomy had evolved into the homosexual species. As Foucault put it, it was “a nature overlooked by the law.”³⁰

These legalistic ways of viewing and normalizing sexuality impacted the islands of Samoa, and all of the Pacific for that matter during the era of colonialism. European and American norms of sexuality altered the world views of Pacific people. In Samoa, it meant redefining life holistically since significant changes were made to the daily rituals and ceremonies of paramount status to fit the views of their new occupants. The *unnatural* ritual ceremonies of Samoa became the dark history, while the natural views of Judeo-Christian Europe became law.³¹ This redefining of sexuality by former colonial powers introduced many foreign concepts to the people of Samoa with the notion of sin having the most impact. An

²⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ See Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese. Efi and Tamasailau M. Suaalii, *Su'esu'e manogi = In search of fragrance: Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi and the Samoan indigenous reference* (Samoa: Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa, 2008). Pages

impact that continues to cause tension within the community today. Restricting sexuality to binary categories contradicts the Samoan communal/collective view that defines the individual not according to gender, sexual preference or age, rather, the value is placed on the individual's contribution to the community. In contrast to *natural theory laws*, every aspect of the Samoan ethos is based on the nature of community.³² If indeed sin could be defined in Samoa prior to missionaries arriving it would denote an act in violation of the laws that sustain communal relationships. This suggests that current Christian principles are in direct tension with the community principles of *fa'a Samoa*. Promoting a more relational theology of sexuality in the Samoan setting is contingent on a willingness to disaffiliate from missionary Christianity; hence partaking in a more relational Samoan Christianity. Still, the path to a relational Samoan Christianity would require a re-interpreting of dominating notions of sin that have governed the lives of Samoan people for nearly two centuries; a task almost always better said than done. Understanding the nature of sin itself, and what *is* actually sinful can lead to more progressive conversations of sexuality. In traditionally conservative settings like Samoa, such a task can present various obstacles depending on the method of interpretation.

James B. Nelson identifies the “seven deadly sins through which the Jewish and Christian traditions have contributed to our sexual alienation, countered by seven virtues or positive resources which these same traditions offer to nurture our sexual wholeness.”³³ Nelson identifies these seven as: 1) Spiritualistic dualism; 2) patriarchal dualism; 3) heterosexism; 4) guilt over self-love; 5) legalistic sexual ethic; 6) sexless image of spirituality; and finally, 7) privatization

³² Ibid.

³³ James B. Nelson, “Where Are We? Seven Sinful Problems and Seven Virtuous Possibilities” in *Sexuality and the Sacred* ed. Marvin Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas 2nd Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 95.

of sexuality. In relation to the *fa'a Samoa* and Christianity, I would like to focus mainly on *spiritualistic dualism* which addresses a core concern that can help Samoan people work through, and get past the *sin-drome*.

For Nelson dualism represents a “radical breaking apart of two elements that essentially belong together, a rupture which sees the two coexisting in uneasy truce or open warfare.”³⁴ Spiritualistic dualism “sees life composed of two antagonistic elements: spirit, which is good and eternal, and flesh or matter, which is temporal, corruptible, and corrupting.”³⁵ Through such dualistic ways of interpreting sexuality and the spirit, the church has focused primarily on the body as the agency of sin and desire. According to this perspective, the spirit is central to the religious life, and controls the bodily life of the individual. Nevertheless, as Nelson points out, deeply rooted in the tenets of both Jewish and Christian faith are countervailing virtues pertaining to sexuality and spirituality:

In Judaism it is a strong belief in the goodness of creation and with it an anthropology that proclaims the unity and goodness of the human bodyself. The Hebrew scriptures show little reticence about human bodies and their varied functions. Neither do they divide the person into parts or locate the core of personhood in some disembodied spirit. They take for granted the created goodness of sexuality and, and at times display lyrical celebrations of the delights of robust, fleshly love.³⁶

Christianity also expresses anti-dualistic virtues by affirming creation as good by placing emphasis on divine incarnation. Nelson states, “Incarnation proclaims that the most basic and decisive experience of God comes not in abstract doctrine or mystical otherworldly experiences,

³⁴ Ibid., 96.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

but in flesh.”³⁷ However, what exactly does that mean? If it is understood that Christianity’s central figure in Jesus became fully flesh, then, as Nelson argues, God’s revelation in Jesus might be understood more inclusively if we were to take serious the repertoire that comes with being in flesh, making the fleshly experience within each of us vitally important to our experience with God. Meaning, “the fully physical, sweating, lubricating, menstruating, ejaculating, urinating, defecating bodies that we are—in sickness and in health—are the central vehicles of God’s embodiment in our experience.”³⁸ When thinking of such normal aspects of the fleshly life, it is highly implausible for the majority of Christians to imagine Jesus existing within such a framework of the flesh. Better yet, it may be a refusal on the part of many because of the dominant narrative controlled by power structures over thousands of years that has separated the spiritual and bodily experiences of Christian life. This model of bodily and spiritual separation was extremely influential in defining sin—as interpreted and taught by missionaries—in the Pacific. This was especially true for many island cultures that did not disassociate the two, but considered both as mutual expressions of spirituality.

In Samoa, this separation of the sexual and spiritual were views introduced by early missionaries. For example, the early Samoan marriage ceremony *fa’aipoipoga* was a ritual norm of old Samoa. Western influence by way of missionaries who inserted Christian versions of purity and sanctity into the consciousness of the people and culture made any reference to *fa’aipoipoga* taboo because of the sexual nature of the ceremony and festivities that followed. In particular, the saying *sae le mata ole aitu* derives from such festivities. To understand this phrase one must imagine oneself in old Samoa, or before Christianity. All of the custom and norms of

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

life were in direct relation to the *aitu* or spirit. The daily lives of the people required a mutual respect with these spirits from the spirit realm that manifested themselves through nature and animals i.e. trees, rocks, birds, and fish. This sacred relationship was called *Va-tapuia* (discussed in a later section of this chapter in depth) and its function was to govern the people socially, economically, and spiritually. The *Va-tapuia* sustained the balance between the temporal and the spiritual. The morals and ethics of Samoa were constructed according to this *Va-tapuia*. On such paramount occasions like the *fa'aipoipoga*—specifically during the festivities that followed the actual ritual—this *Va* between spirits and humans was temporarily shattered. The spirits or *aitu* no longer held the people back from indulging their suppressed fleshly desires and needs. Hence the phrase *sae le mata o le aitu* literally means, ‘the *aitu*’s eye will be scratched out,’ meaning the spirit will not witness the events that will follow. These elaborate festivities that followed the *fa'aipoipoga* sometimes lasted 3-4 days with great feasts and public dances. The *poula* of early Samoa were typical of ancient Polynesian erotic dancing, which was in its origin a form of worship. These dances were “designed to bring into action the *mana* [spirit] of the gods who were believed to be animated as the same emotions as men [and women] and on whose procreative activities the fecundity of human beings, the earth, and sea depended.”³⁹ This controversial public display of spirituality and celebration was condemned due to the openness and free-spirited sexual interactions Samoan’s displayed. One of the dances called the *sa’e* was performed during these festivities. Tui Atua Tamasese reflects: ‘Thinking about the *sa’e* the custodian smiles. The *sa’e* involved anyone, except children, who wanted to join in. The words and movement of the *sa’e* were deliberately designed to provoke a sexual reaction.’⁴⁰ To capture

³⁹ E.S. Craighill Handy, *Polynesian Religion*. 2nd ed., 1985 (Millwood: Kraus Reprint, 1927), 210.

⁴⁰ Tamasailau Sua’ali’i-Sauni et al., *Whispers and vanities: Samoan indigenous knowledge and religion* (Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand: Huia Publishers, 2014), 27.

the essence of such erotic dances, and the ignorant perspectives through which they came to be defined by western culture, Albert Wendt explains in length:

The missionaries (and all other puritans) brought pornography by instilling in us the bourgeois morality of Europe, making us ashamed of the very stories and situations which made us laugh. The puritan would have us believe that one does not exist below the navel. According to a poet friend, “The missionaries came with a Bible in one hand, and a chisel in the other.” True Samoan humour went underground and remains there in those circles we call “respectable.” Occasionally it emerges in print ... verbally our youth reveal it among themselves on more public occasions; the more madly daring of our orators glorify it in the face of the sanctimonious; on the radio, some of our choirs – especially the older male choirs – sing of it with great gusto; in our more traditional faleaitu [comedies] actors display it with gleeful abandonment. And it is good. For our true humour is still alive and may someday – when we have purged ourselves of the guilt we acquired during our colonial experience – surface again in novel, poem, song and play. Perhaps by then the “Victorians” among us would have “passed away” and we will see no need of censorship, of the fig leaf and the chisel.⁴¹

In old Samoa, sexuality had a comedic appeal to it. These dances and free expressions took place only during celebrations involving the whole village or villages. The *poula* provided opportunities for Samoan’s to flaunt the beauty and sexuality of the body in dances like the *sa’e*. The aim was procreation as an endowment from *Tagaloalagi*, and reminded people of the divinity they shared with the divine.⁴² As a result of missionary influence, the Samoan view of sexuality as a gift from God was overshadowed by European “monocultural biases,” as Tui Atua Tamasese calls it. Furthermore, Samoans have inherited, in the words of Tui Atua, a form of “Augustinian guilt.”⁴³ This guilt in their view consciously and unconsciously prohibited Samoan people from ever retrospectively exploring who they once were.

⁴¹ Ibid., 15.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 13.

Samoa Theological Perspectives

Theology has given Pacific people an interpretational voice in both academic and spiritual settings. However, the irony is that Pacific people often find themselves addressing issues that speak to why and how their voices and perspectives were disregarded to begin with. The late Prof. Charles Forman of Yale Divinity School wrote, ‘The Study of Christianity in the Pacific Islands is nothing new. What is new is that the study is being carried out by islanders themselves. Recent years have seen a surge of fresh thinking by theologically trained Pacific Islanders dealing with the Christian religion.’⁴⁴ Theology in the Pacific continues to bridge the gap between culture and Christianity bringing the two once distant worlds together. In specific, Samoan theologians are pioneering many of these new theologies that contextualize the Christian gospel making it more comprehensible for academic and religious purposes. Some of the more recent ideas are that of Christian theologian Ama’amalele Tofaeono and Samoa’s Head of State and cultural custodian Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese.

Tofaeono writes from a Christian theological perspective that draws from Samoa’s oral wisdom traditions as informative sources of Christian spirituality for the church. In his writings, Tofaeono reflects mostly on the Samoan creation myths and the inter-relatedness of early Samoan beliefs with Christian principles that value community. According to Tofaeono, Samoa’s pre-Christian creator God *Tagaloalagi* is not inferior to the Christian God rather, they are one and the same. The people were interconnected with the cosmos and nature from way before the creation. As a result, that special bond reflected in the societal and communal living of Samoa. Tofaeono states, “The mutuality of communal living allowed for corporate responsibilities and functions aimed toward security (spiritual and physical protection), peace,

⁴⁴ Charles Forman, ‘Finding our own voice: the reinterpreting of Christianity by Oceanian Theologians’ *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*. Volume: 29. Issue: 3, July 2005.

and the harmony of all members. Apart from human organization, it was seen that everything in the created cosmos was knitted together in a web of reciprocal and interrelated links.”⁴⁵

Tui Atua Tamasese, on the other hand, provides a window to the divine conceptions, and spiritual beliefs that are primary sources of theological interpretation. He also adopts a more anthropomorphic perspective. Tamasese focuses on the language and rituals symbolic of that same relationship with the Divine. Tamasese explains:

Although we as humans could never and should never presume to know the full mysteries of God’s knowledge and power, there is also something redeeming about the knowledge that in the ultimate, all that is human is vanity. In searching for truth in our religious cultures, I find it impossible to believe that the religions of my forebears during pre-Christian times were not invested with the wisdom and divinity of a loving God, didn’t speak or connect with my people for all those 3000-odd years before Christianity came to Samoa.⁴⁶

The voices of such theologians and custodians of culture are revitalizing to the broken spirits of island people who were once told that their interpretations of the divine were *demonic in nature*, often viewed as performing magic and spells. A significant point to emphasize is that the people doing the work; writing the theologies; and telling the stories are people of faith who have, and continue to wrestle with their faith but continue to find their voices through the beliefs of their ancestors, Christian and non-Christian.

Two central concepts of the *fa’a Samoa* can help carve out a pathway through the thick layers of Christian creeds and doctrines, and the Samoan culture that has been heavily influenced by both. For those on the margins as a result of their sexual identities and preference, and all who advocate for a more inclusive theology and ethic of sexuality in Samoa; a deeper understanding

⁴⁵ Ama’amalele Tofaeono *Eco-theology: Aiga - the household of life: a perspective from living myths and traditions of Samoa* (Erlangen: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 2000), 170-171.

⁴⁶ Tui Atua Tamasese, 37.

of the *Va-Samoa* can stimulate a *Tofa Saili and Tofa Liliu* re-structured on inclusive Samoan-Christian principles.

Tofa Saili and Tofa Liliu

The Samoan milieu is organized by ancient concepts that sustain the *fa'a Samoa*, regardless of time and space. The Samoan concept of *tofa*, which means Samoan wisdom or the received wisdom of an *ali'i* chief, is one such timeless concept. But how is it being used in light of the many sensitive issues that Samoans are discussing (or not) today? Applying these concepts in context can be challenging as many Samoans claim their identities today in diverse settings that overlap religiously, economically, and socially with other cultures. There are many varieties of *tofa*. The more commonly referred to during conversations of extreme sensitivity is *tofa liliu*, which means the received wisdom of an *ali'i chief* that has been transformed or overturned. To begin the process of a search for wisdom is commonly referred to as *saili le tofa* or *tofa saili* which means a wisdom that searches. In order for a *tofa liliu* to be reached it is said that a pre-existing wisdom was considered un-applicable to a problem or concern after careful deliberation that sometimes lasted weeks depending on the issue. In reflecting on *tofa saili* and *tofa liliu*, the question is: can the concept of *saili le tofa* help Samoan people unpack current notions of sexuality, and possibly attain a *tofa liliu* upon careful spiritual, cultural, and theological deliberation? A short answer would be yes, it can and should. However, I argue for a more active phrasing of these concepts in light of contemporary issues that searches for transformative wisdom, or *saili le tofa liliu*; one that compels more agency, and that can take place inside the village as well as the church and beyond. The conceptual underpinnings of Samoan wisdom are considered divinely designed and inspired. These frameworks of ancient wisdom through which

the community in Samoa functions can offer new visions of possibility if applied to current norms of sexuality.

Speaking of the Samoan culture of whispers (*tala tu'umumusū*) in his book *Whispers and Vanities*, Tui Atua Tamasese delves deep into his soul as a custodian of Samoan wisdom and exposes ancient ritual practices considered sexually explicit by missionaries for meaning and purpose. Using the biblical text Ecclesiastes, Tui Atua Tamasese emphasizes the concept “the vanity of vanities” in the text which refers to anything humanity seeks in place of God: “The Preacher [presumed author of Ecclesiastes] pleads with us to release ourselves from the excesses of our vanities or from the blinds that prevent us acknowledging them.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, he states:

The Samoan indigenous concept *tofa saili* pleads for a similar thing. It pleads for the wisdom, in contemplation of our gods and ancestors, to search with humility for that which is good and true; for that which matters. By interrogating the culture of whispers surrounding Samoan indigenous culture, I not only seek to bring to light the vanities of those who dismissed it in arrogance, but also my own vanities and arrogance in wanting to expose them.⁴⁸

Adapting the Samoan concepts of *tofa saili* and *tofa liliu* can provide familiar grounds for dialogue aimed at interrogating current attitudes and practices that marginalize people because of their sexual identities and preferences. The difficulty is that some of the issues regarding sexuality and the *fa'afafine* community are rarely discussed or brought to the table whereby a *tofa saili* or *tofa liliu* can be consulted/reached. This does not assume that these issues can be completely resolved by consulting the wisdom of old Samoa. Rather, the point is that Samoa's wisdom traditions provide the framework of discussion/contemplation for a consensus to be reached that serves the interests of the community. In this way, the *fa'a Samoa* and Christianity, in communion, can be more affirming for *fa'afafine* and provide a platform for their voices to be

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

heard. The task at hand would require a re-defining or fresh lens of interpretation that envisions a more inclusive Samoan *feagaiganu'u* (community) for all marginalized people, including *fa'afafine*. It would be at best misleading to suggest that the Samoan *feagaiganu'u* does not already embrace *fa'afafine*. But there needs to be more attention to the details of how we—non-*fa'afafine* Samoans—have chosen to define *fa'afafine* on our own terms while neglecting to consider their own preferences for being embraced.⁴⁹ In specific, the Samoan *Va* has often been used out of context to describe and position *fa'afafine* experiences. Hence, before concluding this section on theology, it would be inhospitable of me to not explore the Samoan *Va* in greater detail as it is essential in forming robust relational bonds with each other with one pre-requisite; that we are all Samoan.

Understanding the Va-Samoa

What is *Va*? According to Tui Atua Tamasese the *Va* is “the space between; a relational space that both separates and joins; a space that is both sacred and secular.”⁵⁰ Albert Wendt states:

Va is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and thing together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships and the contexts change.... A well-known Samoan expression is “Ia teu le va”—cherish, nurse, care for the *va*, the relationships. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group unity more than individualism, that perceive the individual person, or creature, or thing in terms of group, in terms of *va*, relationships.⁵¹

⁴⁹ In other words, the stories of *fa'afafine* themselves need to be told more often. How do *fa'afafine* define such commonly used terms in Samoa like acceptance, tolerance, and embrace, which are terms usually defined either by the church, government, or in general conversation in the community.

⁵⁰ Tui Atua Tamasese, xxxii.

⁵¹ Albert Wendt, “Afterword: Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body” in *Inside Out: Literature, Cultural Politics, and Identity in the New Pacific* edited by Vilsoni Hereniko, Rob Wilson (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 402.

Some western researchers have incorporated the *Va* into their research on *fa'afafine* as well. Phillip Culbertson describes in his essay *Bobbitizing God*, the case of Lesiva, a *fa'afafine* from Samoa. Culbertson interprets a statement by Lesiva that for her, although she may in private wear a dress, and sometimes a suit, both are extremes that do not capture the totality of her personality and identity. Lesiva goes on to say that for her, “being a female or being a male,” are not her voices. Culbertson states:

I believe that Lesiva is talking about the Samoan *va*, that ‘in-between’ space, ‘ripe’ with possibility, between competing dimorphic gender identities, a space within which both freedom and responsibility are found intuitively. Lesiva seems most at peace with herself when she is performing a gender that has no English name, and which ‘is not one, neither one nor two’, but some other number that I don’t know the name of. Hers is an identity which is true-to-self only by living within the spaces of exclusion created by dualistic thinking.⁵²

Although such assessments of *fa'afafine* define the *Va* as a place where the *fa'afafine* community of Samoa can find solace, and exist—that is—in the *in-between*, it is, however, inaccurate as to the nature and meaning of *Va*. Defining the *Va* as a place/space/home for *fa'afafine* in between the dominant gender categories in Samoan society is problematic. The argument here is that *Va* is a relational concept that connects human beings to one another, and also to the rest of creation through the *one Va* or relationship between all of creation and the creator/divine/god. Therefore, defining *fa'afafine* identity as a place of existence within the *Va* is counterintuitive to the argument that *fa'afafine* are simply who they are freestanding of the gender binary. In other words, existing in—or defined according to the *Va*—further propagates the notion that *fa'afafine* are *different*. This assumes that all *fa'afafine* experiences are similar and

⁵² Phillip Culbertson, "Bobbitizing God," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 5, no. 1 (2009): accessed March 5, 2017, doi:10.2104/bc090005.

further appropriates dominant western methodologies of *outsider researchers*.⁵³ Used in this context, Samoan wisdom concepts and expressions risk being thrown about as cliché phrases unhinged from their fundamental purposes at will. In western discourses, Christian ethicists have cautioned against similar readings of Queer theology. Mark Jordan addresses, in his 1997 book *The Invention of Sodomy*, the risks when the discourse on queer people starts to “echo medieval theology’s preoccupation with the Sodomites.”⁵⁴ This means, as I am interpreting Jordan—a gay man himself—that the gay and lesbian community do not want special attention, privileges, and or extra rights. They simply want the same rights as others in society to live, worship, and exist merely as human beings.

Va does not serve the individual, a specific gender, or community, rather the community serves and upholds the *Va*. This cosmological view of *Va* makes room for all life in the world without distinctions between human gender, mammal, fish, water, or land. For example, there is *Va tapuia* (*sacred relationship*), *Va feagai* (*relationship between people and things*), *Va fealoa 'I* (*sacred space between people and things*), *Va nimonimo* (*sacred/distant sky, universe, cosmos*), and *Va fetausia 'I* (*to nurture the space/relationship/distance*) to name a few. Such concepts of *Va* in the Samoan theological and mythological vernacular denotes a relational framework for living in accordance with the divine understanding that God is in constant relationship with humanity through our relationships with each other and creation. God is *Va–Va* is relationship—and creation/life are keepers of the *Va*.

⁵³ For a more comprehensive understanding of Indigenous research and a critical analysis of Western academic methodologies see Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* Second Edition (New York: Zed Books, 2012), 138-42.

⁵⁴ Mark Jordan, *The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 163.

ii. THE MISSIONARY/COLONIAL ERA

The colonial era in Samoa involved illegal occupation, disease, resistance, bloodshed, and death. As a result of western power struggles between Britain, Germany, New Zealand, and the United States, the islands of Samoa are now divided in two. American Samoa, the US Territory; and Samoa, now recognized as an independent/sovereign country. However, it was Christianity—the dominant religious identity of Samoa’s colonizers—that indoctrinated the people of Samoa with many of the superior ideologies of western civilization. Largely successful concerning matters of sexuality, colonialism aimed to erase the cultural memory of Pacific people. In Samoa, it was the missionaries who were the most successful.

What’s left are mere images of the Samoan culture prior to European contact. But these images tell a story. For example, Erika Wolf’s essay entitled: *Shigeyuki Kihara’s “Fa’afafine; In a Manner of a Woman”*: *The Photographic Theater of Cross-Cultural Encounter*,⁵⁵ highlights the work of Samoan artist and self-identified *fa’afafine* Shigeyuki Kihara. Kihara’s photographic images portray Samoan men, women, and *fa’afafine* dressed (or undressed) in traditional Samoan and Victorian era costumes with one twist; all of the images are of the artist herself. Her work “employs photography to interrogate both colonial history and genre.”⁵⁶ In many of the photos Kihara is photographed often posing as both a Samoan woman, man, and *fa’afafine*. Her images are intentionally seductive, luring, erotic, and ambiguous. They demonstrate how “the imposition of western concepts of sexuality onto Pacific cultures functioned to impoverish and repress rich, multivalent traditions.”⁵⁷ As Wolf explains, her work interrogates western binary

⁵⁵ Erika Wolf, "Shigeyuki Kihara’s “Fa’afafine; In a Manner of a Woman”": The Photographic Theater of Cross-Cultural Encounter," *Pacific Arts* 10, no. 2 (2010): , accessed November 2, 2017, www.jstor.org/stable/23412155.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.

norms of sexuality and gender by highlighting Kihara's work on *fa'afafine*, race, and colonialism to name a few of the thematic aspects of Kihara's work. Consequently, Kihara's work also reveals two profound natures of Samoan sexuality often overlooked; the public and private. The latter—more clandestine in nature—a colonial era phenomena imposed on early Samoans by Christianity while the former represents Samoa's ethos of community before Europeans arrived.

Understanding the premise of these two distinct facets of sexuality in Samoa, and the major events that shaped them, are essential to understanding the current discourses concerning *fa'afafine*. Furthermore, the imposition of western culture on the social norms of old Samoa inherently meant controlling the narrative of sex. In short, Samoa was deeply affected by colonialism and the presence of missionaries.

Sexuality and Colonialism

The colonial wound in Samoa is deep. Initially, it is difficult to identify the trail of pain and tears. Samoan people are proud of their culture and welcoming manner of community, “*O Samoa le malo tali malo*” (Samoans are a people of hospitality). However, the wound of colonialism can be heard/felt in the most unexpected place; they can be heard in churches, through church hymns. The Christian hymns translated into the Samoan language are not only an expression of religious piety, they are also a testimony of the degree to which colonialism invigorated self-deprecation. Many of the hymns celebrate the denigration of the Samoan people's former selves. They are an expression of the guilt, shame, and disgrace Samoan people have expressed in relation to their so called “dark history.” For example, the following is a popular Samoan Christian hymn:

O le pogisa sa tele pei se la'au mafala, I Samoa uma lava, Sa pupuni ai le la. Sa le taunu'u ai le timu I le mea lafua. Sa tutupu na o vao, E leai sona aoga. A ua fa'afetai

*ua taia, Ua gausia lea la'au. Ona le matua mate, Ae memea ona lau. O lenei fa'amalolosi, Nei nonofo fa'avaivai, Ina taia pea lava, lea la'au ia mate ai. A ua fa'afetai alofa I lou silasila mai, Ma lou aumai I Samoa au sauniga e ola ai....*⁵⁸

The darkness overwhelmed all of Samoa like the shade of a widespread tree. The sun could not pass through. Even the rain could not nourish the soil beneath. Only useless weeds grew beneath. Praises, for the tree has been split in two. Even the branches crumble to the ground. Be strong, endure, and may the tree continue to fall. Thank you God for looking upon us, and for blessing Samoa with the gift of new life.⁵⁹

Christian hymns were part of the liturgical tools of the colonial empire. Liturgist and theologian Claudio Carvalhaes explains, “Liturgies were powerful weapons in the conquering/civilizing project. So much so that thinking and living, reasoning and behaving, were to be organized around certain religious practices.” Furthermore, “teaching savages how to properly worship has been an ongoing form of civilization.”⁶⁰

Scott Lauria Morgensen refers to the colonial influence on indigenous cultures as “Sexual Colonization.” In his book, *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization*, Morgensen explains how relational distinctions of “Native,”⁶¹ and “settler”⁶² define the status of being “queer.”⁶³ Reflecting on the Spanish encounters with indigenous people in Panama through the interpretive work of Jonathan Goldman, Morgensen describes:

⁵⁸ Hymn Book of the Congregational Church of Samoa/American Samoa (Pese Samoa), 319

⁵⁹ . My translation.

⁶⁰ Cláudio Carvalhaes, *Liturgy in postcolonial perspectives: only one is holy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 10.

⁶¹ The Indigenous people of North America are usually referred to as Native people. Also, Hawai’ian indigenous people refer to themselves as Native Hawai’ian.

⁶² Colonizer, early settlers of European descent.

⁶³ From personal conversations with many *fa’afafine* community leaders and activists the term queer is largely used to refer to non-Samoans. It is not used in the context of Samoa. However, some Samoans in diasporic communities like America, New Zealand, and Australia have adapted the term to describe their identities suggesting

Early colonist recurrently exacted a terrorizing sovereign right of death in order to educate Native people in the new colonial moral order. While interpreting Peter Martyr's account of Vasco Nunez de Balboa's 1513 expedition in Panama, Jonathan Goldberg notes that Balboa's victorious arrival after battle at the house of the Indigenous king was framed by his condemnation and elimination of what he perceived to be gender and sexual transgression. On reportedly finding the king's brother and about forty other men dressed in women's apparel or living in sexual relationships, Balboa "retrospectively justifies" the conquerors earlier slaughters in battle—in which Spanish soldiers killed Indians "as animals"—or, to quote Martyr, "hewed...in pieces as the butchers doo fleshe." For Goldberg, "post-facto, the body of the Sodomite takes on an originary status, as the cause for what was done to Indians in the first place." Linking ascriptions of savagery to transgressions of a sexual nature thus defined European rule as sexual colonization.

Still, the question remains: Why do Samoan people look upon their past norms with such discomfort? Recognizing the impact of colonialism on Indigenous societies in the Pacific means coming to terms with the reality that current norms of sexuality in Samoa are largely European in nature. During the age of colonialism, the worldview of sexuality was changing, and no stone was left unturned as Europeans made their way to the Pacific to Christianize island people, and sexuality was a main concern to be addressed as first line of business.

Sexuality: From Public to Private

French explorer, Jean-Francois de Galaup de Lapérouse, made first contact with the Samoan people on December of 1787. In one of Lapérouse journals he described Samoan girls

a possible intergenerational shift. I was told by one *fa'afafine* that there are an increasing number of millennial Samoans identifying as queer.

as “mistresses of their own favors.”⁶⁴ Such were the written accounts that circulated 18th century European journals. Many described the sexual nature of island natives.⁶⁵

These exotic stories of Samoa and the Pacific brought most sailors, shipwrecks, and voyagers in the early 17th and 18th centuries to its shores. Furthermore, during this time, popular opinion on sexuality was beginning to shift in a new direction in Europe. Foucault, in his book *The History of Sexuality Vol 1*, describes the European shift from relatively open and public talk of sexuality to the privatized:

At the beginning of the seventeenth century a certain freakiness was still common, it would seem. Sexual practices had little need of secrecy; words were said without undue reticence, and things were done without too much concealment; one had a tolerant familiarity with the illicit. Codes regulating the coarse, the obscene, and the indecent were quite lax compared to the nineteenth century.⁶⁶

But many of these early encounters were brief compared to the *Messengers of Peace*,⁶⁷ the *bringers of the Gospel*; the *missionaries* that altered the political, social, cultural, and religious landscape of Samoa. Their mission? To convert and save souls.

Christian missionaries privatized many of the public ceremonies they interpreted as evil.⁶⁸ John Williams, the first missionary of the London Missionary Society to arrive in Savai’i,

⁶⁴ According to Serge Tcherkezoff “European visitors to Polynesian islands, could not imagine that they were perceived as not-entirely-human creatures and even as envoys from the realm of the gods. They thought that they were received merely as voyagers to whom “hospitality” was offered. The Frenchmen had no conception that the way in which the girls behaved toward them was extraordinary.” See Serge Tcherkézoff, "First contacts" in *Polynesia: The Samoan case (1722-1848)* (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2008).

⁶⁵ Michael Sturma, *South Sea maidens: Western fantasy and sexual politics in the South Pacific* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002), 25-35.

⁶⁶ Foucault, 3.

⁶⁷ LMS Missionary John Williams ship was named “Messenger of Peace”.

⁶⁸ See George Archibald Lundie and Mary Grey Lundie. Duncan, *Missionary life in Samoa*: (Charleston, SC: Bibliobazaar, 2009), 71-72.

Samoa in 1830 was part of a large conversion movement that reached the Samoan islands under quite fortuitous circumstances.⁶⁹ R.P. Gilson writes: “Other islands, according to reports, had been enriched by contact with Europeans to a degree that Samoa had not yet experienced.”⁷⁰ Prior to arriving, word of missionary activity had reached some Samoans, and Samoans, according to Gilson, “pragmatic about their religion, began to wonder whether a supernatural being of surpassing power was at work in the islands.”⁷¹ Additionally, it cannot be emphasized enough that the work of missionaries in the Pacific unfolded in rapid sequence, and completely transformed the daily lives of Pacific island people.⁷² The Samoan encounter with Christianity was subtle, contrary to more hostile encounters missionaries experienced on other journeys in the Pacific. Immediately, the men and women of Jehovah were quick to take advantage of the rather welcoming nature of Samoan people. By 1836, six years after arriving they “devised a written form of the Samoan language and had made and printed a few tentative translations of religious writings.”⁷³ Classes and congregations were also formed to teach the Christian gospel in the newly formed written version of the Samoan language.⁷⁴ As Nicholas Thomas explains, “Architecture, work, adornment, dress, food, and needless to say sex all fell within the

⁶⁹ Shortly before the arrival of John Williams in 1830, Tamafaiga “king of Samoa,” also referred to as “devil chief,” was thought to possess supernatural power. He was also known to be Samoa’s most ruthless ruler, usually known by Samoans as *tevolo* (devil). Gilson states: “The suggestion was that Tamafaiga, had he lived, would have repulsed the London Missionary Society, regarding it [missionaries] as a challenge to his own religious leadership.” Gilson, 70. For a Samoan historical perspective see Toeolesulusulu Damon I. Salesa “Remembering Samoan History” in *Su’esu’e Manogi*, 215-227.

⁷⁰ Gilson, 68.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 75.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷⁴ Note: Missionaries developed a new form of communication through the English language. In the process of translating Samoan words and concepts into English a new world view was accompanied by words and phrases foreign to Samoan people.

missionary remit. In some cases local chiefs and teachers became highly zealous in their policing of offences, fining those guilty of fornication or bad language.”⁷⁵

The most determining aspect of Samoan life addressed by missionaries was the abolishment of rituals and customs concerning sex and family relations. Hence, according to Gilson, “For the sake of godliness and decency the Samoans would have to mend many of their ways.”⁷⁶ Missionaries prioritized:

.... The abolition of polygamy and, in most cases, divorce; the celebration of monogamous marriages in church; the prohibition of certain customary marriage rights; including the exchange of goods and the public test of virginity; the prevention of political marriages and the marriage of Christians and non-Christians; the prohibition of adultery; fornication and prostitution; the prohibition of obscenity in word and action; the imposition of new standards of dress, including ‘full coverage’ for women and, when at worship, shirts or coats for men, but not shoes for either; the adoption of hairstyles ‘appropriate’ to the individuals sex, meaning long for women and short for men, the reverse of traditional styles, the internal partitioning of houses and more liberal use of the external blinds.⁷⁷

By no means are the above examples exhaustive of the ways missionaries attempted (and largely succeeded) to alter the lives of Samoan people. They also abolished practices of “tattooing, mediumship, and the treatment of illness by divination and magic” amongst many other indigenous practices.⁷⁸ Every attempt was made to not only abolish Samoan practices, but also eradicate its memory by educating the people in the ways of “good Christian values.”

The nineteenth century saw a dramatic shift from the relaxed nature of sexuality to the more controlled and privatized. Foucault explains: “Sexuality was carefully confined; it moved

⁷⁵ Nicholas Thomas, *Islanders: The Pacific in the age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 105.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 97.

into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of reproduction. On the subject of sex silence became the rule.”⁷⁹ Furthermore:

A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household, but it was a utilitarian and fertile one; proper demeanor avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one’s speech. And sterile behavior carried the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty.⁸⁰

This was the context of men like John Williams and other Wesleyan⁸¹ and LMS missionaries. The arduous work of converting the “heathenish natives” was contingent on total abolition of Samoan sexual/relational norms. Whereby, “The ultimate reform would be realized when a future generation inherited as its birthright a code of unalloyed Christian values.”⁸² The process of unlearning and learning the new, more Christian values of right-sex and relationships proved to be the most effective means of converting Samoan people.

⁷⁹ Foucault, 3-4.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Methodist missionaries.

⁸² Gilson, 96.

CHAPTER THREE

FA'AFAFINE IN SAMOAN CONTEXTS

i. FA'A SAMOA AND FA'AFAFINE: AN EXPLORATION

Although the literal translation of *fa'afafine* is “in the manner of a woman,” it is not indicative of how all members of the *fa'afafine* community self-identify themselves. In the past, *fa'afafine*, having no visual/distinguishing markers of identity, would have positioned themselves as neutral in the family and village setting.⁸³ Meaning, they could easily have navigated between what some consider typically feminine roles that involved cooking, cleaning, caring for the elders, and helping in child-rearing, and typically male roles of tending to the plantation, fishing, and all other physically strenuous labor. As members of the family and village, there was nothing unusual about being a *fa'afafine* or having a member of the family who identified as *fa'afafine* as long as the social organizing of the family or village was maintained.

Today, however, exposure to western culture i.e. tourism, social media, cable/television, has largely contributed to *fa'afafine* being more visible in society. Especially, as their own experiences can be compared to LGBTQ experiences in other contexts like America where popular culture plays a major role in one's identity. Though today's *fa'afafine* can still be seen in

⁸³ As Jeanette-Marie Mageo states: “For *fa'afafine* especially, movement out of the village and family context often means that the feminine labour role within the family is no longer so significant as a gender marker, and many of the younger urban *fa'afafine* construct a gendered identity that is more reliant on more sexualised Western signifiers such as clothing and make-up.” This, and other visual markers of identity are relatively new ways in which *fa'afafine*, who in the past were more isolated, now express themselves publicly due to a rise in tourism roughly within the last 30 years, an industry that has taken a specific interest in the *fa'afafine* of Samoa. For Western influence on the Samoan context see Jeanette-Marie Mageo, “Samoa, on the Wilde Side: Male Transvestism, Oscar Wilde, and Liminality in Making Gender,” *Ethos* 24, 4 (1996):602. For a comparative study of the influence of tourism on the sexual norms of non-Western cultures, see Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Vol. 7, Nr. 4 “Global Identities: Theorizing Transnational Studies of Sexuality” (Duke University Press, 2001), 673-74.

the villages, many of them are much more public about their unique identity in the urban townships or cities, and have formed social circles/organizations.⁸⁴ In contrast to being strictly defined according to their socio-economic roles, today's *fa'afafine* also identify on the basis of sexual preference. It is precisely this—the *sexually coming out of fa'afafine*—where many like Samoa's Chairman of the National Council of Churches (N.C.C), Deacon Kasiano Leaupepe have made oppositional statements declaring the non-existence of *fa'afafine* within the *fa'a Samoa*:

To be honest, there is no *fa'afafine* in the Samoan way of life. There is the Village *Fono* for the matai, there is a sitting of the untitled men and of course there is a *saofaiga* for *tina ma tamaitai* (mothers and females) but there is nothing in the traditional setting for *fa'afafines*.... If the parents see that in their son's upbringing that he acts like a girl and walks like a girl, they should start teaching them that this is not who they are and explain to them that God did not create them to be females.... This is why we've got this problem today.⁸⁵

Does the *fa'a Samoa* reject *fa'afafine*, or view them as a *problem* as Leaupepe states? As mentioned earlier, much of the discrimination against *fa'afafine* is based on indoctrinated Christian views of sexuality impinged on Samoan society. To Leaupepe's point of *fa'afafine* not having an official role in the *fa'a Samoa*, I would have to agree. However, the same would have to be said of other non-traditional roles synthesized into the *fa'a Samoa*. For example, the roles of the pastor, or Catholic priests who have taken vows of life long celibacy that—in the traditional view—would be considered non-normative behavior for men who were expected to marry, pro-

⁸⁴ Most of these organizations are also help/outreach centers for *fa'afafine* youth who seek counsel and shelter. There are also 24-hour suicide hotlines where young *fa'afafine* can remain anonymous and speak with counselors. The two main organizations are the Samoan *Fa'afafine* Association (SFA), and the Society of *Fa'afafine* in American Samoa. (SOFIAS).

⁸⁵ Deidre Fanene, "Samoa Church Leader: *Fa'afafine* Should Be Respected, But Not Traditionally Part Of The Community," Pacific Island Report, June 27, 2016, , accessed December 1, 2016, <http://www.pireport.org/articles/2016/06/27/samoa-church-leader-fa%E2%80%98afafine-should-be-respected-not-traditionally-part>.

create, and continue bloodlines has been fully incorporated into the *fa'a Samoa*. In essence, these modern roles—religiously legitimized—have become part of Samoan culture and have been designated equal status, if not higher than the chiefs of the *fa'a Samoa*.

In his 2011 address at the 2nd Samoa Conference entitled *Tracing the Footprints of Tomorrow*, Tui Atua Tamasese shared some reflections on how to navigate the future of *fa'a Samoa*. In explaining the theme of the conference he stated:

This phrase catches the point that the conversation between yesterday, today and tomorrow is a continuous one. In the exercise of tracing the footprints of tomorrow we recognize the value of history. We acknowledge that while these footprints belong to beings born unique to this world, they do share a common environment, history and genealogy. In determining our differences and similarities, our rights and responsibilities, to ourselves, to each other to our environments, and to God, we mark boundaries or *tuaoi* and develop cultures or traditions that help us to define the context for these boundaries. It is in understanding the contexts that we are able to negotiate the rules.

In the Samoan context this negotiation process is called *sufiga o le tuaoi*, literally the negotiation of boundaries; a complex concept largely because it is so wide in its reach. It is, however, critical to the Samoan way of thinking about how we should trace the footprints of tomorrow. It offers Samoa a methodology, philosophy and theology for thinking and actioning our relationships with our past, our present and future.⁸⁶

When the people of Samoa embrace their identities, and place themselves within the framework of *fa'a Samoa* they are embracing the qualities and values that sustain them. To deny one's belonging to the *fa'a Samoa* on the basis of gender identity brings into question Samoan concepts like *sufiga o le tuaoi* that Tui Atua Tamasese speaks of as “tracing the footprints of tomorrow.” To my knowledge, identifying as a man or woman has never been a prerequisite of the *fa'a Samoa*. Living, breathing, and practicing *fa'a Samoa* has always been linked to fundamental notions of family, service, and God. From personal experience as both a clergy and

⁸⁶ Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi, “Sufiga o le tuaoi: negotiating boundaries – from Beethoven to Tupac, the Pope to the Dalai Lama” (address, Tracing the Footprints of Tomorrow, Samoa, Apia, December 1, 2015).

Samoan, *fa'afafine* have, and continue to leave their own footprints to ensure that those fundamental values are upheld. Their contributions to the *fa'a Samoa*, and mere existence as Samoans with genealogies (or what Trask calls “bloodlines of memory”) that can trace their footprints back to the ancestors of old Samoa, make them no less Samoan than any pastor, chief, man, woman, child, fish, plant, mountain, or tree. Thus, the exclusion of *fa'afafine* from *fa'a Samoa* based on cultural evidence is uninformed and lacks basic understanding of Samoan culture. These sentiments are heavily influenced by Eurocentric religious and societal views that continue to unweave—strand by strand—the traditional fabric of *fa'a Samoa*, evident in Kasiano Leaupepe’s statement mentioned earlier. In addition, focusing exclusively on the *fa'a Samoa* according to male and female roles would render an inaccurate portrayal of the way *fa'a Samoa* exists and is practiced today. A more relevant question to ponder would be: how are *fa'afafine* shaping *fa'a Samoa* and Samoan society in their own ways?

Fa'afafine are carving out their own pathways of identity and making space where there was once no space. Within the *fa'a Samoa*, those who nurture and cultivate the values of community and love for family are held in high regard for their unselfish service of *tautua matavelea*, or *tautuatoto*.⁸⁷ Typically defined through the gender binary of male and female, today’s *fa'afafine* community are defining *tautua matavela* or *tautuatoto* in their own ways. This does not suggest that *fa'afafine* today are any more active in the *fa'a Samoa* than before. Rather, the responsibilities and contributions of *fa'afafine* to *fa'a Samoa* have become wide ranging.

⁸⁷ According to Fa'alepo Aveau Tuisuga-le-taua this refers to “services rendered with distinction and integrity. *Tautua matavela* or service with burning face. It also reflects service mostly oriented in and from the kitchen preparing food for the matai; and *tautua toto* or service with blood, indicating service with true commitment, to the extent of being prepared to die for the matai. These are normally regarded as in the category of good service.” See Fa'alepo Aveau Tuisuga-le-taua, *O LE TOFA LILIU A SAMOA: A HERMENEUTICAL CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL-THEOLOGICAL PRAXIS OF THE SAMOAN CONTEXT*, Master's thesis, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009 (Melbourne: Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009), 132-134.

It is clear that there are various interpretations of the *fa'a Samoa*. Some interpret the culture as an inclusive system of beliefs and values that look at the contributions of the individual to the holistic concept of *fa'a Samoa* rather than who they choose to claim as lover, and live in community with. From my own experiences, this is a representation of the majority of Samoan people, some more vocal and demonstrative than others, but only because of the rhetoric of leadership in Samoa. A Samoan religious, government, and cultural leadership that exploits the *fa'a Samoa* (as demonstrated in public statements made on behalf of leadership mentioned earlier) so that a certain group of people remain at the periphery of society, does not represent the true values of its people, and falls short of its responsibilities.

If the *fa'a Samoa* is able to thrive solely on the basis of its core values of love and community; peace and coherence; service and sacrifice; only then can it truly live up to its true meaning. All people of Samoa, including *fa'afafine*, live by the communal values of *fa'a Samoa*. Although the roles within *fa'a Samoa* have been interpreted in the past, and still today, to be gender specific, it is important to note that such research and findings have been done through the lens of western scholars. Many of these researchers cultivated their views of the world and other societies through dominant western interpretational lenses.⁸⁸ For Samoans, the strict sense of gendering social responsibilities is a western framework introduced by missionaries.⁸⁹ Despite the enormous impact of missionary views on the sexual norms of Samoa, the community

⁸⁸ Linda Smith, 44-61.

⁸⁹ Missionaries assigned “proper” duties for girls and boys. However, within the Samoan culture, the assigning of different tasks according to gender varies depending on the structure of the family or community. There is no task specifically for boys and girls. The labor is divided according to where one finds his or her talents. For example: some girls are better at fishing than boys, and some boys are better at cooking or cleaning than the girls in the family. The emphasis is placed on the task being completed together, however that may look like. For example, it is traditionally understood that during the sacred ‘ava (kava root pulverized into powder and mixed with water) ceremony it is the *taupou* (village maiden/virgin) who prepares the ‘ava to be consumed by the chiefly gathering. However, in the Manu’a islands of Samoa the ‘ava is prepared strictly by young men. The social organizing of individual roles varied in context. The actors may have been different, but the objective goal was still achieved.

centered foundation of *fa'a Samoa* has provided a sustainable living space for *fa'afafine* to experience growth in ways religion has thus far primarily marginalized them.

ii. CULTURAL ACCEPTANCE AND BELONGING

In Samoa, one's role in church and society is an essential part of life. In the churches, men are generally considered the leaders, assuming they are willing and capable of performing according to church standards. Women also hold certain positions of leadership in the church.⁹⁰ Children fill up the pews and are required to partake in most, if not all activities of the church by their parents. They are also given leadership titles like youth president for example. However, what is the role of *fa'afafine* in the church? The nature of the question stems from the fact that *fa'afafine* are some of the most active and devout members of the Samoan church. In Samoan society *fa'afafine* are publicly praised—and rightly so—by the community, by and large, for their great organizing skills, humanitarian spirit, and overall performance as contributing members to their families, villages, and wider community. However, there is a significant difference between the rhetoric of praise and acceptance, and a true spirit of solidarity that stands for *fa'afafine* rights and justice. The main emphasis of this section is to probe the ways *fa'afafine* are viewed through the lens of church institutions and society; two intricate perspectives that continue to shape *fa'afafine* experiences in Samoa.

⁹⁰ Although this is true, there are limitations to the types of positions women hold. Women can lead the Women's Organizations within the structure of the church but are not appointed to governing committees like the Elder's Committee, which have the most influence in the decision making processes. Also, women have been recently granted ordination status within the Congregational church of American Samoa. However, the ordaining of women does not lead to church leadership as a woman rather, this is in conjunction with the male/husband who is also ordained. As it stands, Women are ordained solely for the purpose of ministry whereby the husband is considered the head pastor of the church. In the Samoan context, the Congregational Church of American Samoa (CCCAS) is the only church body to ordain women.

Samoan Church

Discussions about eroticism and sexuality, for the most part, are rare in the Samoan church. In other words, there is no ‘sex-talk’ during Sunday services. One pastor explained to me: “people do not want to hear those things on Sunday, they want to hear the Word of God.” But how true is this “Word of God” if the least amongst God’s people cannot locate their own experiences within the pastor’s sermons? And when did sermons address only what people wanted to hear? The problem extends beyond this incident, but it is more recognizable in the way *fa’afafine* identities are not affirmed at all from the pulpit.

Within the village churches themselves, *fa’afafine* are youth leaders, and serve alongside women in the church’s Women’s Fellowship groups. They are choir directors, and as choir members, if they so desire they sit in the traditionally female singing sections of sopranos and altos. They are heavily relied upon to organize the youth groups, and are usually the best Sunday school teachers. *Fa’afafine* partake in the women’s task of making the church presentable for morning services, decorating, and cleaning. My description of *fa’afafine* roles within the church is not exhaustive. It does, however, describe the most recognizable ways *fa’afafine* contribute to the church whereby clergy, and lay, can agree upon. Given these examples, the church fully acknowledges the practical value of *fa’afafine*, and the many other ways *fa’afafine* are the “movers and shakers” of the church.

However, how are they valued morally and ethically? As a clergy member of the Samoan church, I have heard many statements in the past from heterosexual men and women that *fa’afafine* are ‘good for the church’, and ‘God loves *fa’afafine* too’. In other words, those who do not identify as *fa’afafine* validate the presence of *fa’afafine* in church through their works, but see no contradictions in the ways *fa’afafine* are marginalized emotionally and morally. As

mentioned earlier, this has much to do with our current theological understanding of God, and what God desires. As it stands, the church's current position that condemns same-sex relationships has paralyzed its discernment and resolve to address *fa'afafine* issues with any seriousness.

There is enormous potential for the Samoan church to heal, and nurture the multitude of people struggling with their sexual identities whether those members are publicly open like *fa'afafine*, or in private. It is quite possible that many *fa'afafine* are reluctant to speak out of fear that the rhetoric of acceptance they have at present, could easily turn into public scrutiny. However, is it not the responsibility of the pastor/church to speak on their behalf? Is it not the vision of the church to seek out those who suffer in silence and bring them to the table; in community with Christ? Sadly, this is not the case in the majority of religious spaces, not only in Samoa, but around the world. In Samoa, this firm grip on regulating love does more harm to the church holistically because it diminishes not only the value of third gender people directly or indirectly, it also creates a rift between people who otherwise see themselves culturally connected without bias.

In short, *fa'afafine* deserve nothing less than the recognition of their full humanity from the church. If the church truly does embody an ethic of love and justice, then the mission, and vision of the church should seek to inform itself by looking to its people. All of them. If the church were to simply look out at the pews it would find the beauty of God's creation where love comes in all shades and colors. To love all of creation is to practice self-love. The question for the church in moving forward is: If others are marginalized, silenced, and ethically devalued within the church; what then does that say about the church? God's message of love and justice does not always come from the pulpit. The saints in the pews also have a *Word* to share with the

leaders of the church. As Kelly Brown Douglas states in her book *Sexuality and the Black Church*:

.... we who call ourselves Christians are constrained to denounce and to tear down those interlocking systems of racist, sexist, and classist oppression that grant privilege to those who may be the right color, right gender, and express their sexuality in an acceptable way. The radicality of God's disclosure in Jesus means that we are called not to try and garner privilege in this interlocking system, but to eradicate such an unjust system of privilege.⁹¹

Those words also ring true for the Samoan church. If the rhetoric is inclusive, while the theology and ethic of the church is homophobic, then the church itself has yet to deal with its own insecurities, and truly practice the meaning of self-love. In alluding to James Baldwin, the Samoan church risks more and more *fa'afafine* (and other saint in the pews) leaving the church to find Jesus.

Samoan Society

With an increase of *fa'afafine* becoming more visible in Samoan society, especially with the rise in media, internet coverage, and various documentaries filming the stories of *fa'afafine*, many public institutions have made statements regarding the *fa'afafine* community. The dominant narrative in Samoan society is that *fa'afafine* are members of the Samoan community who are affirmed and accepted by the culture and both Samoan governments. However, some of these public statements can be misleading and, at times, confusing as to where exactly Samoa stands on *fa'afafine* issues.

In 2016, Samoa's Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi gave the opening remarks for a one-day forum which was part of *Samoa Fa'afafine Week*. In it, the Prime Minister stated

⁹¹ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Sexuality and the Black Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 140.

that “Every human being was made by God in His image.” Furthermore, regarding the role of *fa’afafine* he added, “We have seen the charitable works that have been done by *fa’afafine* and their contribution to their families, churches and villages.”⁹² Regarding his relationship with the *fa’afafine* community he stated: “I was interviewed on the issue of *Faafafine* because I’m the only leader of a country who is also patron of a *fa’afafine* association.” Being a patron of a *fa’afafine* society is a role the Prime Minister of Samoa is extremely proud of.⁹³ It is extremely rare, as the Prime Minister says, that any leader belong to a society of *fa’afafine*, or LGBTQ in other contexts like America. It is also rare that an entire country is as welcoming and affirming of its citizens that identify as third gender *publicly* as Samoa is. Samoa’s Prime Minister and government have made various contributions and advocated to the world that *fa’afafine* are part of Samoan society. This sense of inclusiveness, while promising, contradicts an earlier statement made by this Prime Minister. Four years prior to his above opening remarks in August of 2012, when asked whether he would back any legislation that would support same-sex marriage in Samoa the Prime Minister stated:

My view as the leader of Samoa on this gay marriage issue is simple: There is no way, none whatsoever, that this issue will ever be considered in Samoa. The Samoan parliament would never consider a bill such as this, at least not in my time. It is the strong and combined view of the government of Samoa and the country's religious denominations. We stand united against this because Samoa is founded on Christian beliefs. And Christian beliefs are against this type of behavior which the Bible states, was the reason for the curse that brought destruction on Gomorrah and Sodom. It is very clear that the sacrament of marriage is between a man and a woman. Same sex marriage is a sin. And no matter how people present this issue, no matter how they wrap it up, there is only one truth, and that is, this type of behavior is a sin.⁹⁴

⁹² "P.M. highlights role of *fa’afafine*," Samoa Observer, December 8, 2016, , accessed December 8, 2016, http://www.samoobserver.ws/en/08_12_2016/local/14716/PM-highlights-role-of-fa%E2%80%99afafine.htm.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ "PM firm on rejection of same sex marriage", *Sunday Samoan*, reported by Lealaiauloto F. Tauafafi, 31 March 2013-<http://www.samoobserver.ws/samoans-abroad/4174-pm-firm-on-rejection-of-same-sex-marriage>.

The contradictory relations with *fa'afafine* was also exposed in mid-June of 2016. A controversial article and picture of a young *fa'afafine* who had allegedly committed suicide by hanging herself in front of a church hall she attended was published by the islands largest newspaper *Samoa Observer*. The image of a lifeless Ioane Ipiniu, better known as Jeanine Tuivaiki hanging from a Catholic church hall sparked wide-ranging criticism by many in Samoa calling the article *dehumanizing* and *unethical*. Tuisina Ymania Brown-Gabriel, a representative of the Samoan Fa'afafine Association (SFA) called it a “crime,” and was quoted as saying: “Jeanine deserved better than the violence perpetrated against her at her weakest moments as a human being. Violence against her and her most basic of human rights.”⁹⁵ Furthermore, she stated that the article “deconstructed her persona” and “dehumanized” Jeanine. In a more personal tone, she added: “I am one of the many Jeanines that at our weakest and lowest, have battled with suicide because of this homophobia.”⁹⁶ Interestingly, Samoa’s Prime Minister also made commentary calling the incident “gruesome, insensitive, and unethical.”⁹⁷ The image and unfortunate circumstances of Jeanine’s death gained international attention and criticism, but it was the people of Samoa that were most affected by the incident. On social media, thousands voiced their condemnation of the newspaper’s lack of sensitivity implying that the decision to publish the image was rooted in a failure to acknowledge the full humanity of *fa'afafine* in Samoa. As Brown-Gabriel pointed out, the image “ripped any remnants of humanity from her

⁹⁵ Laura Walters, "Samoan reporting on trans woman's death 'disgusting', 'degrading'" Stuff, , accessed April 15, 2017, <http://www.stuff.co.nz/world/south-pacific/81256086/Samoan-reporting-on-trans-womans-death-disgusting-degrading>.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

corpse.”⁹⁸ Jeanine’s family, the *fa’afafine* community, and the people of Samoa continue to work through the trauma of her passing. This tragedy shed light on the challenges *fa’afafine* continue to face in Samoan societies.

In the US territory of American Samoa, the Society of Fa’afafine in American Samoa (SOFIAS)⁹⁹ hosts a public event yearly with the governor and other political leaders in attendance to support *fa’afafine*. However, as the US Supreme court ruled 5-4 in favor of same-sex marriage on June 26, 2015 Talauega Eleasalo Ale, the Attorney General of American Samoa, issued a statement on behalf of the government as it was the last US State/Territory to hold out on the ruling saying: “We’re still reviewing the decision to determine its applicability to American Samoa, and I have no specific comments at this time.”¹⁰⁰ In a separate incident, A *fa’afafine* public servant in American Samoa filed a discrimination complaint against her employer the American Samoa Department of Human Resources in January of this year. Through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Simeonica Tuiteleapaga filed the complaint in response to the governments lack of disciplinary action even after audio of the incident had surfaced soon after. According to news source Radio New Zealand, Tuiteleapaga alleged that HR director Taeaofua Dr. Meki Solomona harassed her at a staff meeting last year by interrogating her in public asking whether she was a girl or a boy. After replying that she was a woman, Tuiteleapaga claimed that Solomona then ordered her to take her clothes off in the

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ 2015 Fili Sagapolutele Associated Press July 11, "American Samoa questions gay marriage validity in territory - The Boston Globe," BostonGlobe.com, July 11, 2015, , accessed April 15, 2017, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/world/2015/07/10/american-samoa-questions-gay-marriage-validity-territory/DqReQoppUXEVCIs5H2R5fO/story.html>.

¹⁰⁰ "US DOL: Simeonica Tuiteleapaga vs. ASG matter moving forward," US DOL: Simeonica Tuiteleapaga vs. ASG matter moving forward | Samoa News, , accessed April 15, 2017, <http://samoanews.com/local-news/us-dol-simeonica-tuiteleapaga-vs-asg-matter-moving-forward>.

workplace. Tuiteleapaga quoted the director saying “yeah take it off. Let us see if you're a woman.” Since the incident, Tuiteleapaga has claimed violation of her rights under the Civil Rights Act. Tuiteleapaga has filed litigation in the state of Hawai'i.¹⁰¹

The issues mentioned above demonstrate the varying degrees to which divisive church views spill over into government/political policies, even to the degree that some of those policies and statements can be conflicting. As we have seen, Samoan people genuinely love and care for their *fa'afafine* brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters however, the Samoan notion of *alofa moni* (genuine/true love) is constrained by religious/societal dogmas that force many to resort to legal frameworks of thought. When Samoan leaders speak from a place of love, free of doctrines and legislation, it is my belief that the churches and governments of Samoa will truly achieve the full meaning of acceptance; ethically, morally, and theologically.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

i. FA'AFAFINE VOICES

Thus far we have said much about the discourse on sexuality in Samoa and *fa'afafine* experiences. The following section highlights the voices of *fa'afafine* who are current church members in the Samoan community. Through email correspondence, all of the interviewees were asked to answer at least three of the five questions provided. Some were given an option to offer

¹⁰¹ Note: According to Samoa News, several letters on behalf of the Tuiteleapaga family were written and sent to the American Samoa Senate before confirmation of Solomon's HR position as director. However, during the confirmation hearing, Senate President, Gaoteote Tofau Palaie told his colleagues that the work of the Senate is not based on letters and other writings, and a senator's decision should be based on the qualification and experience of a director-nominee. Solomon was fully confirmed in a 15-3 Senate vote. See Agnes Nikolao Pula-Letuligasenoa, "There Must Be Consequences," *Samoa News*, February 14, 2017, accessed April 1, 2017, <http://samoanews.com/opinion/%E2%80%9Cthere-must-be-consequences%E2%80%9D#sthash.R1qISW4L.dpuf>.

their own commentary on their life experiences, whereby two participants opted out with only Participant B providing commentary. For the sake of privacy and possible consequences for partaking in this study (for one participant in particular), the legal identities of all participants have been concealed with only brief reference of one participant to her alias *fa'afafine* name.¹⁰² They are all of Samoan descent and have been members of the Christian church in Samoa, and also America. Their experiences are wide-ranging in age, and church involvement.

Participant A identifies as *fa'afafine* and is open within her church concerning her identity. She is an Assembly of God church member. Participant B has only recently come out as a middle-aged gay man who was raised in the Samoan church. His experience is rooted in the Congregationalist tradition. Finally, participant C is a seminary educated clergy member of the Congregational Church of American Samoa who remains active in *his* (preferred pronoun) role as *a'oa'o* (lay leader).

What follows is a testimony of the heart. The comments compiled underscore some of the pressing issues the *fa'afafine* community face as members of the church and Samoan society. Although the following are not indicative of all *fa'afafine* experiences, they are, however, testimonies and responses that can inform the church of some of these issues that often go unnoticed. In short, the following comments address a need for more open dialogue on sexuality, and the rights of *fa'afafine* who deserve nothing less than the recognition of their full humanity from its church institutions. For the participants in this study the message of love and tolerance are at the center of the Christian faith. It is my hope in sharing their stories that the theology,

¹⁰² Many *fa'afafine* take on alias names separate from their legal names. This can be compared to the western drag queen aliases. However, Samoan *fa'afafine* are fully immersed in their alias names whereby many of them officially change their names legally.

structure, and ethical framework of the Samoan church will one day reflect that message. For now, we, the Samoan church, must first listen.

Participant A

Question #1: As a Christian/Church member, are there some changes (structural/theological/ministerial) in the Samoan church that you would like to see in your lifetime so that the church can be more inclusive? Or are you content with the current progress of the church?

(Response) *I believe it varies with different denominations, As I was in Samoa a few years back, I was well received and respected within my Catholic church. I was able to join or participate in all church ministries, even the women's ministries. I felt as if there were no limitations in terms of serving God as who you are then. They address you as who you are. Then I had also experience such in our Pentecostal (AOG) church, the acceptance of you are, Now I'm at my new church here in Seattle, AOG that is and it's totally different. I'm called by my Tiare name, but not included into the music ministries or any women ministries. (or anything that is female/woman/lady etc...lol) It has not stopped me from attending, due to main purpose was just my personal relationship with Christ. So I feel that it really does depend on the leader/Pastor?*

Question #2: Did you grow up in the church with *fa'afafine* role models? If not, how was your experience in church from childhood to now?

(Response) *Unfortunately I did not grow up with any fa'afafine as a role model. As a child, I was curious about God and just wanted to be a nun, but I was already identified by my family as a boy. So fantasizing to be a religious female saint icon was all I could do. I was not*

allowed to sing in alto or sopranos however, I had a very high voice and very musical in such young age. Mere reason why my uncle brought me over to the United States back in the late 70s was to help sing at his praise team, me singing the lead in soprano yet, I was beaten at all times for being too feminine...very confusing time of my young life. I think today's church is a [sic] partially inclusive than of the past years.

Question #3: What are your views on the Samoan church/government current position on issues like same-sex marriage, ordination of *fa'afafine* in ministry, and some of Samoa's current laws that make same-sex intercourse punishable by law?

(Response) *Tough one...lol. How must one decide when such teaching and doctrines innate, it has taken over my body and soul. But yet? I do not want to be a hypocrite. But we must understand that God has given us the right to make a choice in our lives. We are also given respect; we must honor choices. Respect the choices people make in their lives. I am a fa'afafine and I passionately love God with my heart. And therefore I am not God and I can't make choices for anyone else. But have to learn how to respect their choices in life.*

Question #4: Can there be more efforts to ensure justice for the rights of the *fa'afafine* community?

(Response) *Yes! Understand us, Learn and understand our journey...each fa'afafine has a story to tell, it is never easy. But once you learn, know and understand how we came to be. For all was created and each had a purpose in life.*

Question #5: How does your Christian faith affirm your identity? In contrast, how are some aspects of Christian teaching problematic for you?

(Response) My Christian faith told me that no matter how people looks at me, no matter how people or family disowned you. God is always there. My faith was all I had when I was raped, molested, suicidal and just felt like I really had no place on earth. But my faith told me that God had more important things for me. What is problematic? It's when each pastors has his own agenda, then he uses God's word to manipulate the heart of the people.

Participant B

Question #1: As a Christian/Church member, are there some changes (structural/theological/ministerial) in the Samoan church that you would like to see in your lifetime so that the church can be more inclusive? Or, are you content with the current progress of the church?

(Response) I would love to see the Church tackle more "real" topics and issues that are relevant today. Not just moral anecdotes. Issues that have traditionally been taboo to even bring up in church, even though we know it occurs. Underage sex and teen pregnancy. Homosexuality. Adultery. Transgenders. Trump. The plight of the world's indigenous peoples. Social media. Mainstream media. Etc. Real issues that all of us face in today's reality at one point or another.

Question #2: Did you grow up in the church with *fa'afafine* role models? And, if not, how was your experience in church from childhood to now?

(Response) I didn't have any fa'afafine role models in church growing up. Not any that were out anyway. I did have one that everyone pretty much knew...and talked about it in

whispers when not in mixed company...but no one ever said anything out loud about it. At least not to us kids. Not having one that was out in the church just reaffirmed to me that I was different from everyone else. And that if I didn't want to be laughed at, mocked, or ridiculed as a girly boy, I would keep that difference to myself and work even harder to play the macho super straight role and check out other girls like the other boys my age were doing (when they weren't playing Street Fighter). I left the Samoan church before I came out. From what I understand, the local church has gotten somewhat more progressive and diverse. There are at least two openly gay members of the church whose parents are prominent members and officers. At least one of whom I hooked up with before he came out lol. The Elders would be scandalized if they knew the goings on with me and some of the other boys back then.

Question #3: What are your views on the Samoan church/government current position on issues like same-sex marriage, ordination of *fa'afafine* in ministry, and some of Samoa's current laws that make same-sex intercourse punishable by law?

(Response) *The view of the Samoan church/government on those issues is extremely disappointing. Their insistence on hanging on to these outdated (and some might say, un-Christian) beliefs and positions is even more disappointing. Especially when they have no problem utilizing the God given talent of some of these *fa'afafines* in their choirs. The laws are a joke. On what grounds do they justify regulating someone's sex life? The church AND the government need to get over themselves.*

Question #4: Can there be more efforts to ensure justice for the rights of the *fa'afafine* community?

(Response) More support from Elders, more awareness of the struggle from family members, more legislation in the government that protects the rights of the fa'afafine community, more acknowledgment from the church to undo the demonizing that they've done of the fa'afafine community. More empathy and understanding, less judgment and xenophobia.

Question #5: How does your Christian faith affirm your identity? In contrast, how are some aspects of Christian teaching problematic for you?

(Response) My faith affirms my identity because, at the root of it all, it reminds me that God is Love. And if Love truly exists between two people, how can God not? My faith reminds me that just because something is outside of my realm of understanding doesn't mean it's outside of God's understanding. And that we need to not bind Him to our human limitations. Some of the teaching that continues to be problematic is the message that some people teach using His Word as their supporting documentation. The Bible has been used as a weapon to get an agenda achieved since it was created. That hasn't changed to this day.

Participant B Commentary: *I love Samoa. I love my culture. I love my language. I love my people. But I also love myself. For exactly who and what I am. It took a long, long time for me to get here, but I finally did. And I won't compromise that for anyone. And I am not alone. It breaks my heart that, even as more and more of the world is recognizing us as just a people who want the same opportunity for happiness as everyone else, our own homeland remains steady and steadfast in their uninformed, European influenced beliefs that have been in place for far too long. I only recently felt comfortable enough with telling a childhood friend how, about the same time he started checking out girls, I was checking him out. As expected, he took it much better*

than I think he would have if I had told him way back then LOL. It's my hope that one day, other young Samoan boys who already know they're different from the rest of their friends will have someone to talk to. And help them realize that different doesn't mean the end of the world. And that God made us exactly the way we are.

Participant C

Question #1: As a Christian/Church member, are there some changes (structural/theological/ministerial) in the Samoan church that you would like to see in your lifetime so that the church can be more inclusive? Or, are you content with the current progress of the church?

(Response) *I think the church can do more for the younger generation. There are so many gay and lesbian youth in my church that ask my advice. I never told them I was gay, but I guess it takes one to know one hahaha. I wish I had someone to talk to when I was younger because I spent most of my time in the church. When we were younger it was either school or church. So I want to see the church help the younger generation be more comfortable with who they are. God is love and I heard so many pastors when I was younger talk about how this same God did not approve of homosexuality. I think the church needs to be careful of what it says about God. You know, human beings will never understand God so all we can do is love each other for who we are as people. The church can always do more I think.*

Question #2: Did you grow up in the church with *fa'afafine* role models? And, if not, how was your experience in church from childhood to now?

(Response) Most of the fa'afafine in Samoa would leave Samoa back in the days when they got older. A lot of them left for Hawaii and stayed there. Hawaii was more open for the mala's. They could be who they wanted to be and none of their families got hurt or felt shame because of that. So when I was growing up they were there but eventually they all left for the mainland. I didn't tell anyone how I felt when I was growing up. My dad was a faifeau¹⁰³ and very strict. He knew I was gay but I think he didn't want to accept it. My mom knew too, but she never said anything about it, she liked it when I helped her in church and also around the house. Even today, i still don't openly say that I'm gay even though many people already know. I'm an a'oa'o¹⁰⁴ and being openly gay is forbidden by the church. So I want to respect my family and my church.

Question #3: What are your views on the Samoan church/government current position on issues like same-sex marriage, ordination of fa'afafine in ministry, and some of Samoa's current laws that make same-sex intercourse punishable by law?

(Response) I think everyone should be able to marry and love who they want. In the samoan church it's illegal to be a faifeau and be gay. i want to see that happen especially for all the fa'afafine who are already living with their partners and raising children. So many of them love the church but they leave because they can't really be a couple in public. But I don't know, I don't think the church will ever accept same-sex marriage.

¹⁰³ Pastor, preacher.

¹⁰⁴ Lay leader

Question #4: Can there be more efforts to ensure justice for the rights of the *fa'afafine* community?

(Response) like I said earlier, the younger generation are the ones who are struggling. So many of them are committing suicide and others are turning to drugs and even prostitution. Samoan people say that fa'afafine is a normal thing in Samoa but why are so many of them committing suicide? If people would just give them a chance to be who they are and listen to them I think they would change a lot of minds. As an a'oa'o, I try my best to talk to them but it doesn't help if they see me hiding my fa'afafine side, so the problem is really deep.

Question #5: How does your Christian faith affirm your identity? In contrast, how are some aspects of Christian teaching problematic for you?

(Response) Jesus said the greatest commandment was love. I know there are some teachings in the church that can be really hurtful, but I focus on the love of Jesus. I serve my church and I went to seminary, and do my best to help the faifeau and his wife in the ministry. Even though I can't really be open with who I am o lae silasila le Atua, God knows my heart. I love my church and my faith because it's how I was raised. God doesn't look at if you're a fa'afafine or not, he looks at what's inside. Everyone is the same in God's eyes.

Summary

The testimonies given by the participants provided an insider perspective of the joys and pains *fa'afafine* in church, and Samoan society in general experience. There were some points in each of the testimonies that overlapped. For instance, there is a deep spirit of religious devotion that resonates through every word of the respondents. Even as some of them, in their own words,

expressed discontent for some of the teachings and theology of the church, they continue to move forward relying on their own theological interpretations of love and community. As I reflected on their stories I remembered the wisdom of Tui Atua Tamasese who defines the concept of God-chasing:

God-chasing is about being able to hear and feel those voices that come into dialogue with us in our pursuit of the good in our cultures. The churches, like the schools and hospitals, have a role to play in this dialogue. The long term solution to a poverty of the mind, soul and body is a programme that can touch and feed not only the (rational) mind but the (feeling) heart. Our code of ethics or ethical standards must be more than mere administrative or bureaucratic checks on professional actions. They must also be checks on the physician's, teacher's, leader's or elder's vision for working teaching or healing.¹⁰⁵

In our own individual ways, we are all searching for the same things, asking the same questions, feeling the same joy, and coping with similar trauma from different life experiences. The difference is that *fa'afafine*, no matter how accepted they may be at surface level, continue to be marginalized through the churches homophobic theology. However the church chooses to sanitize that reality, the stories of *fa'afafine* speak for themselves. Furthermore, all three of the participants stated repeatedly that they love the church, and their Christian faith. But how is the church loving them back? How are we as leaders of faith institutions answering Jesus threefold question to Peter: Do you love me? Today, that same question is being asked of the church, from the pews. They are the silent voices of people who continue to be outcasts in their own religious spaces. Through these testimonies we have been given the perspective of Participant A, a *fa'afafine* who has endured the pain and trauma of rape, molestation, and suicidal tendencies. Participant B shared about the difficulties of adolescence, and his constant struggle to maintain the balance between his internal sexual identity and his identity expected of him in Samoan

¹⁰⁵ Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi, *Su'esu'e Manogi: In Search of Fragrance* (Lepapaigalagala: National University of Samoa, 2008), 150.

society. Finally, Participant C provided a rare and unique perspective of a *fa'afafine* who has chosen to serve God as a member of the clergy consequently having to deny who he truly is in public. Yet, despite the trauma, rejection, pain, and othering *fa'afafine* experience, they are determined to live and love the church unconditionally. These participants have shared their most intimate thoughts and traumatic experiences. However, their stories come with a responsibility that invites us into their world; to view the church through *fa'afafine* eyes. Still, it remains to be seen that if Jesus truly is the center of the Christian faith in Samoa, then, the message of Jesus inclusive love must be a reflection of all people regardless of race, sex, gender, and sexual preference. In other words, the church needs to *come out*, and, as we have read, there are many *fa'afafine*, beginning with the three mentioned above, who are willing to aid that process.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

Key Implications

Beverly Harrison says “.... people are starving for a more mature conversation about how to live in self-affirming, other-affirming, non-hurtful ways.”¹⁰⁶ After listening to my views about *fa’afafine* and the Samoan church, Marvin Ellison stated: “I think what you’re saying is that the church needs to grow up!”¹⁰⁷ And as Tui Atua Tamasese was asked during a conference: “Why do you need to understand the Samoan indigenous reference?” He answered, “As a Samoan you need it in order to know yourself, to protect yourself, and to find yourself in your search for meaning and for God.”¹⁰⁸ The experiences of *fa’afafine* in the Samoan church has been informative in so many ways, but as Marvin expresses, the church really does have plenty of growing up to do. Likewise, it’s spiritual identity must be coupled with knowledge of its indigenous identity as Tui Atua Tamasese suggests if there is any hope for a more affirming environment of faith and culture.

As church people we need to ask: What gives meaning to the church and our Samoan culture? Personally, meaning derives from our relationships with God and each other. The church does not stand above its people, rather, it is an institution of faith that is in solidarity with its members; all members. People and things do not give value to the *fa’a Samoa* rather, it is the relational bonds formed through the *fa’a Samoa* that furnishes our lives with meaning.

¹⁰⁶ Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Justice in the Making: Feminist Social Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 69.

¹⁰⁷ In conversation with Marvin Ellison 4/14/2016.

¹⁰⁸ Tui Atua Tamasese, *Su’esu’e Manogi*, 207.

Is there social justice in Samoa for *fa'afafine*? Words aligned with action can amount to endless possibilities however, this is not the case in contemporary Samoa. There is, however, no shortage of *social-talk*, as seen in the various commentaries from non-*fa'afafine* government and church leaders. My claim is that when talk of justice starts to materialize into the work of justice, then, one can finally say that there are valiant efforts to ensure equal rights for marginalized people like Jeanine Tuivaki or Simeonica Tuiteleapaga. And when theology seeks to illumine and be informed by the experiences of people, social justice can become a reflection of God's agency in the world.

Before any of that can take place the process of achieving a more socially just Samoan society will require a radical awakening of Samoan consciousness. A new wisdom is needed to address the needs of the *fa'afafine* community; a wisdom that is constantly searching for life affirming solutions to today's issues. This requires new vision that inspires action, not out of fear, but out of love and commitment to justice for the least among us. Therefore, the *fa'a Samoa* offers a framework for such a vision to be realized. The foundational wisdom concepts of Samoa coupled with Christian social principles and teachings open up new and vibrant possibilities for *fa'afafine* to be simultaneously immersed in their Christian and Samoan identities without reserve. In addition, the rhetoric of acceptance can no longer be defined by those of us who *do not* have the experience of *fa'afafine*. It must be their *fa'afafine* voices that control the narrative of their existence for it is they who must live in their own bodies.

Although some church and government leadership may argue otherwise, the current theological, ethical, and legislative guidelines suggest that Samoa is not a fully inclusive atmosphere for people regardless of gender identity or sexual preference. There is an inconsistency between the rhetoric of acceptance and the discriminatory practices against same-

sex marriage, ordination of openly gay *fa'afafine*, and equal rights of *fa'afafine* in church and the work place. To be fully inclusive and Christian, the church—the moral and ethical compass of Samoa—must dismantle the very tenets of ideologies and doctrines that oppose equality for all members of the community regardless of race, gender, social class, or sexual orientation. But not simply because it is the most Christian thing to do, but because it is the most Samoan thing to do as well. Holding on to toxic ideologies and doctrines far-removed from the diverse experiences of the people sends the wrong message to members of our communities like the *fa'afafine*. It suggests that their whole existence, the way they feel, and the emotions they have for their fellow human being must be altered to fit the binary of *natural* and *unnatural*. It is difficult to comprehend that the mystery of God—God who created the cosmos and positioned the stars—can be reduced to such unimaginative notions of understanding.

In its current state, the church and Samoan society contradict at various intersections as this study argues. However, my hope is that this study, and these series of questions, will lead to more serious inquiry on behalf of Samoan people in Samoa, and around the world.

Moving Forward

Forging ahead will prove to be the most challenging aspect of identifying and addressing the many issues *fa'afafine* face. The ignorance of homophobia is a plague that has potential to infest Samoan culture and religion with intergenerational consequences, as it has in the past. However, leaders of faith institutions have a platform to end the divisiveness of bad theology. What is needed is a more affirming ethic that balances the culture and religion of Samoa by creating something new through fresh eyes. It will require fresh readings of scripture, new definitions of revelation, and deeper theological reflection on who Samoan people really are,

even if that means evoking the essence of who we once were prior to our now Christian identities. Even if that means awakening the spirits of our ancestors; deliberately crossing religious boundaries set by our former occupants. There is something beautiful in the making, and Samoa is at an oddly convenient position to explore those possibilities in depth. Colonialism took so much from us, but it also gave us perspective. Samoan people understand what an inferior complex is. We know what it can do to an entire people, and I hope that somehow through the words and testimonies of this study, we understand what people on the margins experience daily.

Yes, Samoa is not perfect, but we are imperfect according to our own standards and communal ways of life. In another context, some might consider our islands a model society paving the way and setting the example for the rest of the world. Which suggests that Samoan culture has surpassed western civilization in this respect. Not with technology, powerful governments, or massive economies. Rather, it is our longing for yesterday; our stubborn nature of holding on to our traditions, stories, myths, and legends. As the ancient navigators of the Pacific it is embedded in our DNA to seek new islands of knowledge and wisdom in the vast Moana¹⁰⁹ of life.

The inconsistencies in the rhetoric, theology, and culture of Samoa today says less about Samoa, as it does about the world around us. After all, we are but a speck on the globe, easily overlooked with the blink of an eye. But even from this tiny speck, there is potential for Samoa's people and culture to provide a world view very different from western society. One that values community, and views humanity not as genitals and body parts, but as members of a global family. My hope is that the church, and all of Samoa can look to its past to navigate our search

¹⁰⁹ Ocean, sea.

for new wisdom. This work is just the beginning of a *tofa saili*. In any case, I do pray that it leads to a *tofa liliu* that will strengthen our *Va* with God. God is *Va–Va* is relationship–creation/life are keepers of the *Va*. *Soifua* (Live Well)!

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Consent Form

[UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY]

[Informed Consent Form for _____]

Name the group of individuals for whom this consent is written. Because research for a single project is often carried out with a number of different groups of individuals - for example counselors, community members, clients of services - it is important that you identify which group this particular consent is for.

You may provide the following information either as a running paragraph or under headings as shown below.

[Name of Principle Investigator]

[Name of Organization]

[Name of Sponsor]

[Name of Project and Version]

This Informed Consent Form has two parts:

- **Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)**
- **Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)**

You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form

Part I: Information Sheet

Introduction

Briefly state who you are and that you are inviting them to participate in research which you are doing. Inform them that they may talk to anyone they feel comfortable talking with about the research and that they can take time to reflect on whether they want to participate or not. Assure the participant that if they do not understand some of the words or concepts, that you will take time to explain them as you go along and that they can ask questions at anytime.

Purpose of the research

Explain the research question in lay terms which will clarify rather than confuse. Use local and simplified words rather than scientific terms and professional jargon. In your explanation, consider local beliefs and knowledge when deciding how best to provide the information. Investigators however need to be careful not to mislead participants, by suggesting research interests that they do not have. For example, if the study wants to find out about treatments provided by local practitioners, wording should not suggest that they want to find out about

how the practitioners are advertising themselves. Misleading participants may be essential and justified in certain circumstances, but that needs to be carefully argued, and approved by an ethics committee.

Type of Research Intervention

Briefly state the type of intervention that will be undertaken. This will be expanded upon in the procedures section but it may be helpful and less confusing to the participant if they know from the very beginning whether, for example, the research involves a vaccine, an interview, a questionnaire, or a series of finger pricks.

Participant Selection

Indicate why you have chosen this person to participate in this research. People wonder why they have been chosen and may be fearful, confused or concerned.

- ***Example of question to elucidate understanding:*** *Do you know why we are asking you to take part in this study? Do you know what the study is about?*

Voluntary Participation

Indicate clearly that they can choose to participate or not. State, only if it is applicable, that they will still receive all the services they usually do if they choose not to participate. Explanation: It may be more applicable to assure them that their choosing to participate or not will not have any bearing on their job or job-related evaluations. This can be repeated and expanded upon later in the form as well. It is important to state clearly at the beginning of the form that participation is voluntary so that the other information can be heard in this context. Although, if the interview or group discussion has already taken place, the person cannot 'stop participation' but request that the information provided by them not be used in the research study.

- ***Examples of question to elucidate understanding:*** *If you decide not to take part in this research study, do you know what your options are? Do you know that you do not have to take part in this research study, if you do not wish to? Do you have any questions?*

Procedures

A. Provide a brief introduction to the format of the research study.

B. Explain the type of questions that the participants are likely to be asked in the focus group, the interviews, or the survey. If the research involves questions or discussion which may be sensitive or potentially cause embarrassment, inform the participant of this.

Duration

Include a statement about the time commitments of the research for the participant including both the duration of the research and follow-up, if relevant.

- ***Examples of question to elucidate understanding:*** *If you decide to take part in the study, do you know how much time will the interview take? Where will it take place? Do you know that we will be sending you transport to pick you up from your home? Do you know how*

much time will the discussion with other people take? If you agree to take part, do you know if you can stop participating? Do you know that you may not respond to the questions that you do not wish to respond to? Etc. Do you have any more questions?

Risks

Explain and describe any risks that you anticipate or that are possible. The risks depend upon the nature and type of qualitative intervention, and should be, as usual, tailored to the specific issue and situation.

Benefits

Benefits may be divided into benefits to the individual, benefits to the community in which the individual resides, and benefits to society as a whole as a result of finding an answer to the research question. Mention only those activities that will be actual benefits and not those to which they are entitled regardless of participation.

Reimbursements

State clearly what you will provide the participants with as a result of their participation. WHO does not encourage incentives beyond reimbursements for expenses incurred as a result of participation in the research. These may include, for example, travel costs and reimbursement for time lost. The amount should be determined within the host country context.

- ***Examples of question to elucidate understanding:*** *Can you tell me if you have understood correctly the benefits that you will have if you take part in the study? Do you know if the study will pay for your travel costs and time lost, and do you know how much you will be re-imbursed? Do you have any other questions?*

Confidentiality

Explain how the research team will maintain the confidentiality of data with respect to both information about the participant and information that the participant shares. Outline any limits to confidentiality. Inform the participant that because something out of the ordinary is being done through research, any individual taking part in the research is likely to be more easily identified by members of the community and therefore more likely to be stigmatized. If the research is sensitive and/or involves participants who are highly vulnerable - research concerning violence against women for example - explain to the participant any extra precautions, you will take to ensure safety and anonymity.

The following applies to focus groups:

Focus groups provide a particular challenge to confidentiality because once something is said in the group it becomes common knowledge. Explain to the participant that you will encourage group participants to respect confidentiality, but that you cannot guarantee it.

- **Example of question to elucidate understanding:** *Did you understand the procedures that we will be using to make sure that any information that we as researchers collect about you will remain confidential? Do you understand that we cannot guarantee complete confidentiality of information that you share with us in a group discussion Do you have any more questions?*

Sharing the Results

Your plan for sharing the findings with the participants should be provided. If you have a plan and a timeline for the sharing of information, include the details. You may also inform the participant that the research findings will be shared more broadly, for example, through publications and conferences.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw

This is a reconfirmation that participation is voluntary and includes the right to withdraw. Tailor this section to ensure that it fits for the group for whom you are seeking consent. The example used here is for a community social worker. Participants should have an opportunity to review their remarks in individual interviews and erase part or all of the recording or note.

Who to Contact

Provide the name and contact information of someone who is involved, informed and accessible - a local person who can actually be contacted. State also the name (and contact details) of the local IRB that has approved the proposal. State also that the proposal has also been approved by the WHO ERC.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by [name of the local IRB], which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find about more about the IRB, contact [name, address, telephone number.]. It has also been reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee of the World Health Organization (WHO), which is funding/sponsoring/supporting the study.

- **Example of question to elucidate understanding:** *Do you know that you do not have to take part in this study if you do not wish to? You can say No if you wish to? Do you know that you can ask me questions later, if you wish to? Do you know that I have given the contact details of the person who can give you more information about the study? Etc.*

You can ask me any more questions about any part of the research study, if you wish to. Do you have any questions?

Part II: Certificate of Consent

(This section is mandatory)

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

*If illiterate*¹¹⁰

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had the opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the individual has given consent freely.

Print name of witness _____

Thumb print of participant

Signature of witness _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Statement by the researcher/person taking consent

I have accurately read out the information sheet to the potential participant, and to the best of my ability made sure that the participant understands that the following will be done:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

A copy of this ICF has been provided to the participant.

Print Name of Researcher/person taking the consent _____

Signature of Researcher /person taking the consent _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

¹¹⁰ A literate witness must sign (if possible, this person should be selected by the participant and should have no connection to the research team). Participants who are illiterate should include their thumb print as well.

Appendix II

Interview Questions

#1: As a Christian/Church member, are there some changes (structural/theological/ministerial) in the Samoan church that you would like to see in your lifetime so that the church can be more inclusive? Or are you content with the current progress of the church?

#2: Did you grow up in the church with fa'afafine role models? And, if not, how was your experience in church from childhood to now?

#3: What are your views on the Samoan church/government current position on issues like same-sex marriage, ordination of fa'afafine in ministry, and some of Samoa's current laws that make same-sex intercourse punishable by law?

#4: Can there be more efforts to ensure justice for the rights of the fa'afafine community?

#5: How does your Christian faith affirm your identity? In contrast, how are some aspects of Christian teaching problematic for you?

Appendix III
Glossary of Samoan Terms

Aitu	spirit, evil spirit, ghost
ali'I	chief. Sir, lord
a'oa'o	lay leader
atua	god, spirit, ghost
fa'a samoa	Samoan way of doing, Samoanizing
fa'afafine	fa'afafine (in the ways of a woman)
fa'aipoipoga	Samoan marriage ceremony
faifeau	Samoan Pastor/Preacher
feagaiganu'u	community
mana	power, supernatural
papalagi	caucasian, white person, European
poula	celebrations, sacred dances
sa'e	erotic dance, procreation dances
Tagaloalagi	Supreme deity/god
tala tu'umumusu	whispers of wisdom passed down
tapu	taboo, sacred, holy
tautua matavela	service with burning face
tautua toto	service in blood
tofa	wisdom
tofa liliu	new/transformed wisdom

tofa saili/saili le tofa	searching wisdom
va	space, between, relationship
va feagai	relationship between people and things
va fealoa'I	sacred space between people and things
va fetausia'I	to nurture the space/relationship/distance
va nimonimo	universe/cosmos
va tapuia	sacred/forbidden bond