NEW ZEALAND
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PACIFIC RESEARCH

# Church Responses to Gender-Based Violence Against Women in Samoa

Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, Melanie Beres, Caroline Blyth,
Ramona Boodoosingh, Tess Patterson, and David Tombs

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Professor David Tombs, University of Otago

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# Executive Summary

Church membership in Samoa is exceptionally high, and the moral authority and community leadership of churches in society is widely recognised. The churches in Samoa therefore have enormous potential capacity to contribute proactively to social well-being. In recent years the Samoan government, the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, and the National Human Rights Institute have identified the importance of prevention initiatives on violence against women (VAW). The Samoan Government Second Progress Report 2010 has highlighted the need to address violence against women, and identified the contribution that churches might make towards this:

> The churches should be heavily involved in addressing violence against women. It is proposed that a special taskforce be established with all the relevant authorities to adequately analyse and determine strategic interventions at all levels that would address violence against women effecttively. The involvement of key NGOs such as Samoa Victim Support as well as the National Council of Churches would play a key role in consolidating appropriate interventions that would reduce violence against women (Samoan Govt. 2010: 10).

International experience suggests that biblical texts can promote a significant difference within churches to attitudes and actions on VAW prevention. A biblical and faith-based approach is well-placed to promote social change in Samoa. Work with biblical texts is critical for two reasons. First it addresses the temptation for churches to dismiss VAW prevention as a purely secular issue which is of little concern to the churches. Second, it offers generative resources to critique ways in which churches can be part of the problem, and also support discussion of ways in which churches might take leadership as part of the solution.

There are some biblical verses that are widely used to justify or excuse violence against women. However, at the same time that the selective misuse of biblical texts contributes to the problem, there is also recognition that these interpretations should be questioned and challenged. A positive biblical message promoted by the churches can, and should, be offered as an effective response to the misuse of biblical texts. Texts that affirm the dignity and sacred value of all people, as created in the image of God, and highlight the destructive consequences that violence creates for individual, families and communities deserve particular attention.

This report is in three main sections. The first section case-studies two group bible studies developed and piloted during the project to promote a deeper discussion on VAW. The bible studies are part of a larger bible study resource, which will be available in both English and Samoan, for work in this area. The second section offers a background briefing on VAW in Samoa with particular attention to the challenges it raises for churches. The third section, emerging from the project conference in Auckland on 11 June 2018, discusses the creative approach adopted by Mercy Ah Siu Maliko in the research.

# Project Team

**Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko** (lead researcher) is a Lecturer in Theology at the Piula Theological College. She received her BA and BTh from the University of Auckland, her MTh from Pacific Theological College in Fiji, and her PhD in public theology from Otago University. Her post- doctoral work focuses on violence against women in the church and Samoan society.

**Dr Ramona Boodoosingh** is Senior Lecturer in the School of Nursing and Health Science at the National University of Samoa. Her doctoral studies explored the support services available to victims of violence against women in developing countries, focusing on the experiences of women in Samoa and Fiji. Her current research interests include gender-based violence and health literacy.

**Dr Melanie Beres** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Gender, and Social Work at the University of Otago. Her programme of research is centred around the concept of sexual consent, with a particular interest in sexual violence prevention.

**Dr Caroline Blyth** is Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies at the University of Auckland. Her research explores the complex relationship between gender, sexuality, and religion, focusing particularly on religious responses to gender-based violence. Caroline is also managing co-editor of the Bible and Critical Theory journal and, along with Johanna Stiebert (University of Leeds) and Katie Edwards (University of Sheffield), leads the Shiloh Project, an interdisciplinary research group exploring the intersections that exist between rape culture and religion.

**Dr Tess Patterson** (project consultant) is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Otago. Her research interests are in applied clinical and forensic psychology domains.

**Professor David Tombs** (principal investigator) is the Howard Paterson Chair of Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago. His current research focuses on religion and violence, especially Christian responses to gender-based violence, sexual abuse, and torture. He is originally from London, and has previously worked in Britain (University of Roehampton, London) and Ireland (Trinity College Dublin).

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# Section 1
# Tatala le ta'ui le Atua | Rolling Out the Mat of Scripture

# Reading the Bible in Context

*Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko*

## Tatala Le Ta'ui A Le Atua in Samoan Culture

*Tatala le Ta'ui a le Atua*[1] presents a series of Bible studies rooted in the importance of being relational in the Samoan culture. It embraces the belief that the self takes its form from maintaining relationships. *Tatala le Ta'ui a le Atua* as a Samoan saying articulates the necessity to reconnect with one's God, ancestors, neighbour/s and environment, to reveal a person's genuine self-identity rooted in the relationship of respect, and concurrently, revealing the image of God in humans.

The word *ta'ui* has a specific use. It's a word used to refer to the finest of fine mats that has long been pressed and reciprocally cared for within homes. This delicate fine mat is not rolled together with other ordinary rolls of mats or anything else. Although the same pandanus leaves are used to weave fine mats and mats used every day, still a mat cannot be called a treasure, unless it is the finest of fine mats. It is a fine mat treasured and protected. It is a fine mat that is not simply laid bare, sat on or for someone to trample on, but a fine mat people respect. It is not an ordinary fine mat that is displayed using long sticks to hold it up because of its size. It is one fine mat that can be folded and put in an elderly woman's woven basket or it can be simply held in an orator's hand. Another view is that because the fine mat has been kept for a long time, it can become delicate, shiny, and eye-catching. This is the reason why when such a fine mat is opened or rolled out, those who roll it out literally have goose bumps and say, "Oh it is the treasure of a noble." This is the type of fine mat seldom rolled out except on special and significant occasions; then, such a treasure is rolled out in public. The use of this Samoan saying in this project articulates the significant role of scripture as the finest fine mat rolled out to transform human relationships damaged by gender-based violence against women and violence in general.

## Defining Gender Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is violence that is targeted against individuals or groups on the basis of their gender. This violence is a clear sign of deeply entrenched power inequalities between men and women. While it cuts across class, ethnicity, religion, able-bodiness, age and location, it primarily affects women and girls. The term GBV is hence often interchangeably used with 'violence against women'.[2] This violence is often perpetrated by men, and women and girls are often the victims. In Samoa and other contexts, GBV always results from unequal power relationships between men and women. Violence is directed specifically against a woman because she is a woman,

1 This concept was proposed by Rev. Latu Kioa to articulate the connection between the Samoan symbol of fine mat and scripture. The Samoan explanation of the term was also written by Kioa in the Samoan language and translated into English by the author.
2 http://www.un.org accessed 23 October 2017

and because she has less power than her (male) abuser. GBV includes, but is not limited to, physical, sexual, and psychological harm.[3]

## Bible Study Method

This series of Bible studies draws on the work of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. The aim of Freire's model of transformation is to empower people through the process of self-awareness or consciousness raising. It is a creative way of enabling people to think for themselves, so that what they learn becomes authenticated in their lives. This includes the sharing of ideas, debates, dialogue, discussion, and working with others as subjects rather than as objects.[4] Freire, in his educational philosophy, advocates that 'Education is the key to liberation.' For Freire, education is never neutral. It is 'political' in the sense that its main objective is either to maintain the status quo, or to educate for liberation.[5]

Using Freire's method as a guide to doing Bible studies serves the following purposes: to develop dialogue, participation, self-identity, empowerment and confidence in participants (men and women); and to transform their spiritual lives.[6] This 'praxis-centred' methodology attempts to move the participants toward 'reflection-action' exercises that will ultimately bear fruit in the form of empowering and liberating Good News for the churches and communities where the participants are situated, and especially in relation to the issue of GBV against women. The designed Bible studies follow a specific structure that begins from raising awareness to concrete action/s as an ongoing process, taking into account the importance of the contexts and needs of participants.

3 United Nations Population Fund, Gender Theme Group (1998).
4 Paulo Freire, *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard University, 1972 ), 27.
5 See Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "Conscientization and Pacific Women," *Pacific Journal of Theology*, no. 41 (2009).
6 Ibid

# O le Tala ia Akara

*Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko*

**KENESE 16: 1-16 O LE TALA IA AKARA ... (E SILAFIA E LE ATUA TAGATA UMA)**

**FAITAU LE TALA IA FAAPEI O SE TALANOAGA (NRSV)...**

*Filifili se to'afa mai ia i latou oloo auai i le mafutaga e faitau ma faaleoina upu ma lagona o Sarai, Aperamo, Akara, ma se isi to'atasi e avea ma faamatala'upu o le tala, e pei ona tusia i le Tusi Paia.*

**[FAAMATALA'UPU]**: O Sarai, o le avā a Aperamo, sa lē fanau o ia. Sa ia te ia se teine-pologa mai Aikupito e igoa ia Akara, ua faapea atu Sarai ia Aperamo,

**(SARAI-APERAMO)**: Ua e silafia ua finagalo le Alii ia 'ou lē fanau, alu ia oe i la'u teine-pologa; atonu ou te maua ai ni fanau ia te ia.

**(SARAI-APERAMO):** Ia luga ia te oe lo'u agaleagaina! Na ou tuuina atu la'u nei teine-pologa ia te oe, ae ina ua ia iloa ua to o ia, ona ia faaleaogaina ai lea o a'u. Ia faamasino mai le Alii ia te oe ma a'u!

**(APERAMO-SARAI)**: Faauta, o ia te oe le pule i lau teine-pologa, faitalia lava oe i se mea e te faia ia te ia.

**(AGELU-AKARA)**: Akara, le teine-pologa a Sarai, o fea e te sau ai nei a o fea foi a e alu i ai?

**(AKARA-AGELU)**: Ua ou sola ese mai lo'u matai tamaitai o Sarai.

**(AGELU-AKARA)**: Ia e toe fo'i nei i lou matai tamaitai, ma e faalogo ma usita'i ia te ia. O le a ou faatoateleina lau fanau ma e le mafai ona faitauina ona o le toatele. O le a to oe ma e fanauina se tama tane; e te faaigoa ia te ia o Isamaeli, aua ua faafofogaina e le Alii lou tiga. O le a avea o ia ma asini vao, o le a fai tagata uma mona fili, e avea foi o ia ma fili o tagata uma.

**(AKARA-AGELU)**: O oe o Pere-Laaroi; Po ua ou vaai ea i le Atua ma ou ola pea ina ua mae'a ona ou vaai ia te Ia?

**[FAAMATALA'UPU]**: Ua fanauina e Akara se tama tane mo Aperamo; ma ua faaigoa e Aperamo lona atalii mai ia Akara, o Isamaeli. Ua valusefulu ma le ono tausaga o Aperamo ina ua fanau Isamaeli mai ia Akara.

**ULUA'I ILOILOGA O LE TUSI ...**

*Ia manatunatu lelei i fesili ua tuuina atu i lalo. Faatalanoa fesili nei i ni vaega to'aitiiti ona tuuina ane lea o le aotelega o finagalo fa'aalia i luma o le vaitele. Ia fa'amalamalama e lē o loo ta'ita'ia le iloiloga ni fa'amatalaga (tuā 'ele'ele) e uiga i le tusi faitau.*

1. O le a le mea o loo faatatau i ai le tala?
2. O ai tagata 'autū o le tala?
3. O le a se mea taua e faatatau i tagata 'autū ta'ito'atasi?
4. O a ni fe'au poo ni mata'upu taua o i le tala?

## AOTELEGA O LE TALA...

O le tala ia Akara i le Kenese e 16 ua na o sina vaega o le tala atoa e faatatau ia Aperamo.[7] I lea manatu, e atagia mai ai o Akara e lē taua tele i le tala. E ui lava na o Akara le tagata mai le mataupu lenei sa mafai ona talanoa ma le Atua, peitai e manatu nisi au faitōfā o le Tusi Paia o le tala o loo 'autū lava ia Aperaamo ae lē o Akara. Latou te manatu o le tuai faataunuu o le folafolaga a le Atua mo se suli o Aperaamo, o le ute lea o le tala nei, ma e faataua nisi ae le o Aperamo.[8] Peitai, o nisi au fai tōfā, o loo latou faatauaina Akara o se uluai tamaitai i le tusi o Kenese na mafai ona talanoa ma se agelu a le Alii, o ia foi le uluai tagata na faia le suafa o le Atua i le Tusi Paia Eperu. O ia foi o le uluai tina na muamua folafola iai e le Atua ni ē o le a fananau mai ia te ia. O itu ia e iloa ai le taua o Akara ma e mafai ai ona manatu nisi o le au faitau i le tala lenei i le Kenese e 16, o loo faatatau ia Akara. E le o Aperaamo. O le tala e faatatau i se tina e lē taualoa ma "o sē na faaluafesasi ai le tala faasolopito o le faaolataga."[9] E mafai foi ona faapea o le tala lenei e uiga ia "Akara ma le Atua-o-Lē-Silasila mai."[10]

## TUĀ'ELE'ELE O LE TUSI FAITAU...

Ina ia mafai ona malamalama i le tuā'ele'ele o le Tusi, e taua le suesue i nafa o Akara, Sarai ma Aperamo o i le tala. O la nafa sa faatinoina sa fua lava i lo latou siosiomaga aemaise o le soifuaga na ola ai tagata i lena taimi.

**Akara**...lona uiga sa "fai ma tagata sola fa'ananā," "sola ese," "sola." E ui lava o Akara o se tamaitai Aikupito, peitai o lona igoa e afua mai le gagana Eperu. E foliga mai o sona igoa sa faaigoaina ai e Aperamo poo Sarai ona o lo la malamalama'aga faa-Aikupito.[11] E faamatalaina Akara i le tala o se tamaitai e le'i faia sona aiga, mativa, ma o se pologa foi. Afai o se tamaitai pologa mai Aikupito, e leai la ni ona malosi'aga. Lona uiga e tele ni itu ma'ale'ale e mafai ai ona afaina lona ola – o se tasi o ia itu ona o ia o le tamaitai/teine, o lona tulaga o se pologa, o le tagata nuu 'ese, e le gata i lea e leai ma se alii e aiga i ai, lona e matua leai sona malu poo sona faalagolagomaga. E ui i ia itu uma ua ta'ua, peitai na avea lava o ia ma mea tau faamata'u ia Sarai ma Aperamo (Ken.16: 5-6). Talu ai ona o lea ua mafai ona fanauina e Akara se suli, ua o se faamata'u tele lea ia Sarai, o le tina e pa e le fanau. O le nafa o Akara o loo faamatalaina manino i le Kenese e 16 aemaise lo la va ma Sarai. O loo faamatalaina o se teine pologa mai Aikupito (*shiftiah* i le gagana Eperu) a Sarai. O le *shiftiah* e le o se pologa teufale pei o le to'atele, peitai, o ia o se meatotino a lona matai tamaitai. I lea faauigaga, o le tuuina atu o Akara o se *shiftiah* e Sarai ia Aperamo, o le tulaga aloa'ia faaletulafono ina ia maua ai se atalii mo Sarai. O Akara sa faitauina ua na o se meatotino sa fa'aaogaina mo ni feusuaiga e ona "matai." O i o loo faamatala

7 In Genesis 16, Abraham is called Abram, and Sarah is known as Sarai. It is only in Gen 17.5 that God renames them as Abraham and Sarah. The name Abram means "exalted father", while Abraham sounds similar to a Hebrew term meaning "father of many." Both Sarai and Sarah mean "princess."
8 G. Von Rad, *Genesis*. Translated by John H. Marks. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1961), 186.
9 E. Tamez, *The Woman who Complicated the History of Salvation. New Eyes for Reading*, edited by John S. Pobee and Barbel von Wartenberg-Porter. (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone Books, 1986).
10 Patricia Shelly, "Hagar and the God-who-sees: Reflection on Genesis 16: 3-13," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 11 (1993): 265-268.
11 Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*. (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2008), 286.

mai ai le leai o sona malosi'aga poo ona loto e faia i le tala nei ma lona afaina gofie i sauaga, faatama'ia ma le olopalaina.

I le manatu o James Okoye, "o Akara sa matauina o se meatotino, o se oloa e mafai ona fa'aaogaina i soo se taimi e manaomia ai e soo se tasi pe a finagalo malie iai o lona matai. E le tau faanoia pe se a sona lagona e uiga i fetuunaiga ua faia mo ia; ae poo a foi ni ona lagona e le afaina ai se faaiuga mo lona faaaogaina."[12] E augapiu lava ma se leo o Akara i le tala atoa. E leai lava ma sina taimi e faapea na talanoa faatasi ai Sarai ma Aperamo ia Akara. O le leai o se leo o Akara o se tasi o faailoilo o le leai o sona malosi'aga.

Sarai... I le Kenese 16, o loo faamatalaina ai Sarai o le ava a Aperamo, ma o se "tina e pa." E ui e foliga mai o loo faia uma e Sarai tonu o le aiga, ma e talu ai o le leai o sana tama o i o loo taoto ai le faamamafa a lona aiga, aemaise o le faamatalaina o ia (Sarai) i le tala. Mulimuli ane, o le faafitauli o Sarai ua avea ma faafitauli o tagata uma o lona aiga, e ui o loo faamatalaina o ia o se tina ua faaipoipo, mauoloa toe saoloto. O le faamatalaina o lona tulaga faatina, e fua lava i luga o ona nafa masani i le aiga o se avā ma le tina. O i o loo fausia mai ai ona "agava'a" mo lona aiga. Ma, o lona lē fanauina o se tama ua avea o se faafitauli. O le ala lea ua ūnaia ai o ia e sauāina Akara, o lē e lē mafai ona tali ane i se upu. O le fuā o Sarai i si teinetiti na fa'aaogaina e fai mona suimomo'e, na te fanauina mo ia se tama mai lana tane na mafua ai ona ia osofa'ia loa si teinetiti. O le tala lenei ua taula'i i le afaina o Akara. O le faauigaga a Phyllis Trible i le tala lenei o loo faavae i luga o le pule a Sarai, o le matai tamaitai, i lana pologa, o Akara.13 O i o loo matuā manino mai ai a faafesaga'i le tagata pule ma le tagata e leai se malosi'aga, e i'u lava ina masani i le sauaina.

E tusa ai i tu ma aga a Isaraelu anamua, soo se tina e pa e le fanau o se matuā luma lava. O lea tina ua leai sona mamalu pe amanaia foi. E fai ma mea ula a nisi tina! E lua ni vaega e tatau ona vaai iai Sarai: (1) o le nofo pa ai pea i lona olaga atoa, talia le luma, poo le faatali se'i alofagia o ia e Ieova; poo le (2) tuuina atu o lana auauna teine, o Akara, ia Aperamo ina ia maua mai ai sona suli.14 Na filifili e Sarai le vaega lona lua, auā ua na silafia o se tama e fanau mai e Akara o le a avea ma ana tama. Sa ioeina faatasi e Sarai ma lana tane le mea ua manatu i ai Sarai, ona o le lagona e fia maua se tama. Fai mai le manatu o Renita Weems:

> O le mana'o o Sarai ua atagia ai le tali masani a ulugalii faapenei e lē aloa pe leai se fanau—o le tali a se tagata ita, lē mautonu, ma tiga. Ma oute masalo o le ita leaga o Sarai ia Akara ina ua tō, e iai le feso'otai ma lona tiga. E o'o fo'i i le taimi a'o le'i fanau Akara, o le putaputa ane lava o le manava o Akara, o se foliga vaaia lea ia Sarai o lona lē fanau aemaise lava o lona nafa tonu lea o le faasuliina o le aiga, a ua faatino e le isi tagata ae le o ia. O le to a Akara o le faamaoniga lena i tagata uma o tiga o feagai ai ma Sarai aemaise o lana faai'uga e fia maua mai sana tama mai se isi. Ua o se faamata'u i lona soifua i aso uma ma lona tagata. Ae ina ua

12 James C. Okoye, "Sarai and Hagar: Genesis 16 and 21," *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament* 32 no. 2 (2007): 167.
13 Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).
14 Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 445.

> faalēaogā (vaai maualalo) e Akara ia Sarai, o se mea na lē fetaui i le vaai a Sarai – o le mea ua tulai mai nei ua pona'ia ai le tele o isi mau mea, ua pisia ai se mea lelei sa manatu iai ma ua manatu e tatau ona tuuina atu loa se faai'uga talafeagai ma fetaui lelei mo Akara.[15]

O Sarai o se tina e lē femoumoua'i sona manatu! Talu ai o lona lē fiafia i le mea ua tulai mai, ua faanoanoa ai ia Akara. Ina ua tō Akara, o iina na suia ai ona foliga ma lana vaai ia Sarai. E manatu Renita Weems o le tō a Akara ua fafagu ai se lagona sa natia i totonu ia te ia: o lona tāūa, o le mafua'aga o lona soifua ma le mea o aga'i i ai lona faasinomaga[16] e pei ona faamaonia i le fuaiupu e 4b: "ua iloa e ia ua tō o ia, ona ia faaleaga ai lea i lona matai tamaitai." Poo le a lava se isi mafuaaga, ua le toe tutusa le vaai a Akara i lona matai tamaitai e pei ona i ai i le ulua'i taimi. O lea suiga ua avea ma faamata'u ia Sarai. O le tu'ua'ia e Sarai o Aperamo i le fuaiupu e 5 masalo e faapea ona o le leai o se tala a Aperamo ia Akara aemaise ina ua fa'aalia foliga vaai maualalo o Akara. E foliga mai ua manatu Akara o le a iā te ia se malosi'aga, auā o le a avea o ia ma tinā. Ma ua avea lea ma mea tau faamata'u i le pule a Sarai i lona aiga. O le talosaga a Sarai ia Aperamo ua ia faapea ai o Aperamo na mafua ai se manatu Akara o ia o se tina ma ua la tulaga tutusa ai.[17]

O le tali a Aperamo e faapea "O ia te oe lava le pule i lau auauna tamaitai; faitalia oe se mea e te faia ia te ia" (v.6) ua mafua ai le tali sauā a Sarai ia Akara, ma o le ala lea na sola ese ai loa Akara mai ia te ia. E foliga mai ua talia e Aperamo lona tiute ma le leai o sona leo ina ia maua ai le avanoa e fa'aalia ai le aia tatau faaletulafono a Sarai. E ui lava i le pule faatamā a Aperamo, a ua gaua'i lava i le mana'o o Sarai, ma ia ioeina ai le aia faaletulafono a Sarai e pei ona ia faatinoina. O i e iloa ai e le o i ai se lagona o Aperamo e saili se fofō o le faafitauli.

**Aperamo**... o le ata o le pule faa-augatamā aemaise o le faatulagaga o le Ulua'i Feagaiga e pei ona faata'oto mai i totonu o lenei tala. I le tala lava lenei, o Aperamo o le tane a Sarai. O se tasi o augatamā, peitai sa gaua'i ma leai sona leo i totonu o le mataupu atoa lenei e 16 o Kenese. Sa na o le faatino lava o faatonuga a Sarai la te momoe ma lana pologa, ae ina ua alia'e le faafitauli, sa leai lava sona leo. Sa lagona e Aperamo le tatau ia te ia ona fa'ataunuuina le folafolaga a le Atua na te fanauina se tama. Sa telē lona a'afiaga ona o le lē fanau o Sarai ma lona lē mafai ona fa'ataunuuina lea folafolaga.

## O SE VA'AI FA'A-MATĀ'UPU SILISILI...

E ui lava e ese le ituaiga aganuu faailoga tagata lea ua ola a'e ai Akara e pei o le tala nei, o loo faamamafa e le tala le taua o tagata taitoatasi i lalo o le pule a le Atua. O Akara o se ata faatusa lea o le fa'aauauina pea o folafolaga mo le faaolataga ma manuia e tauala mai lea ia Aperamo/Aperaamo.

Sa fa'aali le Atua ia Akara i le vao ma folafola i ai o le a to ma ia fanauina se tama tane na te faaigoa ia Isamaeli, e avea foi o ia

15 Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego, CA: Lura Media), 1988.

16 Ibid.

17 E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Anchor Bible; Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1964).

o se "asini vao," e le mafai ona pule ai se tagata pe faalataina e se tasi.[18] E le fai o ia ma pologa e pei o Akara; ae peitai e sa'oloto o ia i le vao. E fai tagata uma mona fili, e fai foi o ia ma fili o tagata uma; e faatu foi e ia lona fale'ie i luma o ona uso (vv. 11-12). O le faamaoniga lea na silasila Ieova ma Ia faafofogaina Akara ma ona tiga. O Akara o le tina muamua lea o le Tusi Paia na ulua'i folafola i ai e le Atua se fanau e to'atele, ma e le mafai ona faitauina ona ua to'atele. Sa tali i le loto talitonu moni ma le faatuatua Akara i le Atua. Na ia ta'utino lava ua aapa mai le Atua e lavea'i ia te ia: "O Oe o Pere-La'aroi, o le Atua ua silasila mai" (v. 13). Na faaigoaina e Akara le Atua e ala i le agelu na la fetautalatalaa'i, "O le Atua ua silasila mai i lo'u tiga."[19] O le suafa o le Atua, Pere-La'aroi, e le o tā'ua i se lava vaega o le Tusiga a Eperu. O le igoa lea na faaigoa ai e Akara le Atua, na maua mai i lona lava iloa o le Atua: ina ua ia mautinoa lona lumanai ma se faamoemoe fou. E na o Akara lava le tagata nuu ese o loo i totonu o tusitusiga a Eperu na ia faaigoaina le Atua i se igoa fou.

E le gata i lea, o le ta'utinoga a Akara ma lona faaigoaina o le Atua e faamatala mai ai ia i tatou e le faailoga tagata le Atua na o Aperamo ma Sarai; peitai na silasila mai le Atua (o le uiga o le igoa Isamaeli) ia Akara i le taimi na faanoanoa ai aemaise o ona mafatiaga. Na fa'aali le Atua ia Akara, ma la talanoa, ma Ia faia ni folafolaga ia Akara e pei ona ia faia ia Aperamo. O le fa'aali mai o le Atua, ua fa'ailoa ai e na o Ia e malu puipuia ai le tagata ua taotaomia ma tuulafoa'iina. O le tulaga faaletagata o Akara na matua aliali i le la talanoaga ma le Atua. Na folafola e le Atua ia Akara o le a avea lana tama tane ma ta'ita'i o se nuu tele. O le Atua o Akara e mo tagata uma, e le na o i latou o fai ma ulu/pule. O le avea o Akara ma "sē ua filifilia" e le Atua – e mafai ai foi ona tatou faapea e filifilia foi e le Atua so'o se tasi e o'o lava i tagata lē taualoa ma lē amana'ia. O le Atua lo latou malosi ma lo latou 'olo.

O le tala ia Akara o se matua lu'itau tele mo Kerisiano e le o manatu mamafa i mataupu e a'afia ai le faatinoina o le amiotonu mo tagata uma. O le tala i sē na lē amana'ia ma faitaulia, a ua talanoa ma vala'au i ai le Atua. O le tala ia Akara o loo manino ai e siitia i luga ma galulue faatasi le Atua ma ē lē taualoa ma a'afia i totonu o aiga, ekalesia ma so'o se faalapotopotoga. O loo faamautu mai i le tala lenei, e leai se tagata e ta'u o se tagata-noa i le Atua ma e amanaia ma tutusa tagata uma i le Atua, ma e tatau foi ona faapea i tatou. O le tala ia Akara o loo vavala mai ai le taua o tagata taitoatasi i pulega faa-le-Atua. O se tala na te aumaia se fe'au mo tagata uma i le aiga o le Atua. Poo a lava ni o tatou eseesega, o le Atua lava lo tatou mapusaga. Fai mai Marina Hofman:

> E lē tau mateina vaega na fetaia'i ma Akara—o lona sauāina ma le lavea'iina e le Atua, aemaise o lona lagona mautinoa—na suia ai lona olaga. Ina ua ia fetaia'i ma faigatā, o iina na mafai ai ona faavae ai se isi amataga fou mo ia, o se ola ua toe amata, e le mai le amataga i le olaga na soifua ma ola a'e ai, a o se amataga fou ua afua atu i nai motugā'afa i mea ua tutupu i lona ola. E mafai ona tatou lē ioeina le toe faafo'iga e le agelu o Akara i lē na sauāina o ia; ona o lo tatou

18 E. Tamez, *The Woman who Complicated the History of Salvation. New Eyes for Reading*, ed. John S. Pobee and Barbel von Wartenberg-Porter (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone Books, 1986), 16-17.

19 Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 126.

manatu i se lalolagi e tatau ona sa'o ma tonu, ma sa tatau i le agelu ona lavea'i ia Akara i le mea ua tupu ia te ia, aemaise ina ia puipuia mai o ia i nisi mea e faaono tutupu mulimuli mai. Peitai, o le olaga o Akara —e pei foi o i tatou ia—tatou te ola i le lalolagi o mea lē tonu ma lē sa'osa'o. E tatau ona toe fo'i Akara, o le toe fo'i a le tagata ua maua se isi faasinomaga fou ma ua faamalosi'auina o ia, e lē ma le vaai maualalo, a ona ua ia mautinoa mai le Alii. E lē tūtū-noa sona lumana'i, a ua mautinoa le faatumuina i le fa'amoemoe e afua mai le Atua. Sa va'aitino i le Atua i le vao ma ua toe fo'i o se tagata ua suia.[20]

## FESOOTAIGA O LE TALA MA LE ASŌ...

O le tala ia Akara o loo mafai foi ona atagia i totonu o Samoa, o le va masani lava feagai ai o alii ma tamaitai ma e mafai ona avea ma sao i le sauāina o nisi foi tamaitai. O ituaiga sauaga nei e afua mai ona o le lē tutusa o le pule o loo maua e tamaitai ma alii i lo latou siosiomaga o loo soifua ma ola ane ai. O le malosi ma le pule a le itupa o alii Samoa, e afua mai i tu ma aga masani a pulega faatamā a Eperu e pei ona maua i a latou tusitusiga. O le upu moni, o le va feagai ai o tane ma tina i Samoa, ua fau mālō lava pulega faatamā. O se tasi o faataitaiga faigofie o nei pulega lē tutusa ona o le ituaiga tagata (alii poo le tamaitai), o loo mafai ona atagia i le faiga o nofotane i totonu o aiga o a latou tane. E mafai ona faapea, o tulaga pagatia o feagai ai ma nofotane, na te faamatalaina tiga ma puapuaga o feagai ma tagata. O gaioiga a Sarai ma Akara i le tusi o Kenese 16: 1-16, e o gatusa lelei ma le tali a se tagata o a'afia ma e mafai ona fesoasoani lea vaai na te faamatalaina le ituaiga tali na tali atu ai Aperamo aemaise o tagata o le nuu.[21] Mulimuli ane, e o'o lava i lagona o le lē taofiofi, ita, ma le sauā o le a avea ma tali masani pe afai e afaina, aemaise pe a finau lē ua a'afia e fia su'e sona saogalemu, o le tali la o lea ua tatou vaai i ai, o le sauāina loa e Sarai o Akara.[22] O le gūgū o Aperamo e aunoa ma se leo e mafai ona faapea o lona lea taumafai ina ia faatumauina lana pule faatamā i le va ma Sara ma Akara.

## FA'AAOGAINA O LE TALA IA AKARA E FAALAUILOA AI SE FE'AU TAUA E UIGA I SAUAGA E FAAVAE I LUGA I ITUAIGA TAGATA E PEI O SE ALII PO O SE TAMAITAI/TINA (GBVAW)...

*Ia vavae i ni vaega to'aitiiti, ona tofi lea o nisi e faitauina le talanoaga a Sara ma Aperamo, ma ia faasoa i fesili o loo i lalo ina ia mafai ona maua le agaga ma lagona moni o upu sa felafolafoa'i ai Sara ma Aperamo:*

> O lea ua e iloa lelei lava ua finagalo le Alii ia 'ou lē fanau; alu la'ia i la'u teine-pologa; atonu ou te maua ai ni fanau mai ia te ia. O le mea leaga ua ia faia ia te a'u, ia i ou luga lea! Sa ou avatu la'u teine-pologa ia lua momoe, ae ina ua to o ia, sa vaai maualalo mai ia te a'u. Ia faamasino mai le Atua ia te oe ma a'u i lenei mea!
>
> O lau teine-pologa, o loo i lalo o lau lava pule; pule oe ma le mea e fai i ai.

1. O a ni foliga o loo atagia mai i le felafolafoa'iga a Sarai ma Aperamo?

20 Marina Hofman, "Retelling Hagar's Story: Reading Trauma in Genesis 16," *The Other Journal: An Intersection of Theology & Culture* 25 (2015). Retrieved from https://theotherjournal.com/2015/12/03/retelling-hagars-story-reading-trauma-in-genesis-16/
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.

2. O le a le popolega tele o Sarai i le tala nei?

3. Mai i lea felafolafoa'iga/talanoaga, e lē o tā'ua lava le igoa o Akara, peitai e faalua ona faailoa e Sarai o "lana teine-pologa" a'o Aperamo o "lau teine-pologa." Faamata o a ni a'afiaga poo se sao o ituaiga uiga nei ma igoa faapenei i le GBVAW i Samoa poo isi atunuu?

4. O le ola "tau-tuua'i i isi" o se tasi o a'upega e masani ona fa'aaogaina e i latou e faatinoina sauaga o le GBVAW. O e vaai o tupu lea faiga i lou siosiomaga?

*Talosaga i vaega to'aitiiti ta'itasi e tofi mai so latou sui e faasoa mai le aotelega o a latou tali. E mafai ona faailoa mai sa latou tali e ala i se ata puupuu, pese, po o se isi lava auala latou te manatu e talafeagai. O lē o loo fa'atautaia le vaega lenei, na te saunia se aotelega o tali ma tusia i luga o se laupapa poo se pepa siata.*

## NISI FESILI MO NI FAASOA FA'AOPOOPO...

*Mai fesili o loo i lalo, faalototele ia i latou o loo auai ina ia mafai ona latou faasoa mai i mea o loo feagai ma i latou i aso ta'itasi. O le ā se sao taua o le tala lenei mo i latou e mafai ai ona mafaufau loloto i mafutaga i totonu o latou aiga, nuu, ma ekalesia.*

1. O i ai ni faataitaiga o mea o loo tutupu mai lou lava siosiomaga e tutusa lelei ma le tala ia Akara?

2. E mafai ona e matauina lelei nisi ituaiga GBVAW o loo atagia i totonu o le tala?

3. E mafai ona e aumaia ni faataitaiga o le GBVAW mai totonu o lou lava nuu?

4. E fa'apēfea (auala) ona e faailoaina faalaua'itele nei ituaiga sauaga mo le nofo silafia e tagata uma?

5. O a nisi mea e mafua ai le GBVAW o e matauina i totonu o lou lava siosiomaga.

## MAI LOU ILOA MA MALAMALAMA UA MAUA I LE GALUEGA FAATINO...

Ina ua e malamalama e ala i faatalanoaga, felafolafoa'iga ua iloa tonu ai faafitauli, e tatau loa ona aga'i i latou o loo auai ina ia mataitū poo auala e faailoa ai le GBVAW mo le silafia lautele e tagata uma. E le gata i lea, e tatau foi ona faamanino poo a ni auala mo ni galuega faatino ma fa'aauauina pea ma toe iloilo nisi auala talafeagai mai totonu o Samoa lava ia. Mo se faataitaiga, e mafai ona valaaulia se sui mai se Faalapotopotpoga tuma'oti e lava se tomai i le mataupu nei [GBVAW] ina ia faasoa i ekalesia, ma ia fa'atautaia ni a'oa'oga e vala'aulia ai le mamalu lautele o le atunuu. O faamatalaga uma e faatatau i mafuaaga o sauaga i totonu o aiga ma ona a'afiaga, e tatau ona faailoaina i se auala faigofie ma 'aua nei avea o se mea tau faafefe, a o se auala ina ia atagia ai le alofa/agape.[23] O ni fa'ata'ita'iga o mea moni na tutupu e uiga i le GBVAW (e aunoa ma le faailoaina o suafa) e mafai ona fa'aaogaina o ni tala mo nisi auiliiliga ma su'esu'ega mo i latou o loo auai, ma saili auala e fofō ma toe tapu'e ai le soifua e le gata o tagata ua a'afia a o i latou foi na faatinoina sauaga, ina ia mafai ona taofia ma faamuta loa sauaga.

23 Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "Public Theology, Core Values and Domestic Violence in Samoan Society." Phd thesis (University of Otago: Dunedin, 2015).

# The Story of Hagar

*Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko*

## Genesis 16: 1-16. The Story of Hagar… (God Sees All)

### Key Objectives

- To raise awareness of the story of Hagar as a biblical text.
- To promote a thoughtful and informed discussion of challenges raised by the story and to explore its themes of power, gender inequality, and family violence.
- To connect the text with experiences today and consider how the church should respond.

### Introduction to the group

*Explain the process: creating a safe space, developing respect, trust and the freedom to share.*

### Reading the Text As Conversation (NRSV)

*Select four participants to read the voices of Sarai, Abram, Hagar, and another to read the narrator's part, as indicated in the text.*

**[READER]:** Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar, and Sarai said to Abram,

**(SARAI-ABRAM):** You see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing children; go into my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.

**(SARAI-ABRAM):** May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my slave-girl to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!

**(ABRAM-SARAI):** Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please.

**(ANGEL-HAGAR):** Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?

**(HAGAR-ANGEL):** I am running away from my mistress Sarai.

**(ANGEL-HAGAR):** Return to your mistress, and submit to her. I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude. Now you have conceived and shall bear a son; you shall call him Ishmael, for the Lord has given heed to your affliction. He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone; and he shall live at odds with all his kin.

**(HAGAR-ANGEL):** You are El-roi; Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?

**[READER]:** Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

### Initial Analysis Of Text

*Allow time to reflect on the questions below. Discuss these questions in small groups and then report back briefly to the large group. The facilitator will then provide explanatory and background material.*

1. What is the story about?
2. Who are the main characters in the story?
3. What is important about each character?
4. What are the most important issues in the story?

## Summary of the Text

The story of Hagar in Genesis 16 is often regarded as only an incident in the larger Abraham story.[24] This view does not recognize the importance of Hagar in the story. Although Hagar is the only figure in the chapter who experiences dialogue with God, many scholars tend to focus on Abraham rather than on Hagar. They regard the delay of God's promise of descendants to Abraham as the central theme of the story, and deal with characters other than Abraham only marginally.[25] Other scholars, however, highlight the importance of Hagar as the first woman in Genesis to encounter the angel of the Lord, and the first person to name God in the Hebrew Bible. Hagar is also the first woman to receive the promise of descendants from God. This emphasis on the importance of Hagar's experience directs readers to realize that Genesis 16 is a story about Hagar. It is not about Abraham. The story tells of a marginalized woman "who complicated the history of salvation."[26] It may be called the story of "Hagar and the God-Who-Sees."[27]

## Background to the Text

To understand the background of the text, it is important to examine the roles of Hagar, Sarai and Abram in the story. Their roles were played according to the background and context of the text.

**Hagar**...means "to be a fugitive," "to flee," "flight." So even though Hagar was an Egyptian, her name was Hebrew. This means her name was probably given to her by Abram or by Sarai because of their experience in Egypt.[28] Hagar is portrayed as single, poor, and a slave. As an Egyptian slave woman, Hagar is powerless. So she is marginalized in more than one way – by virtue of her gender, her status as slave, and as foreigner, as well as the fact she has no male kin to support her. But her presence still poses a threat to Sarai and Abram (Gen.16: 5-6). Hagar's ability to produce an heir is a serious threat to the barren Sarai. The role of Hagar is introduced in Genesis 16 in relation to Sarai. She is introduced as the Egyptian slave (*shiftiah* in Hebrew) of Sarai. *Shiftiah* is not an ordinary household slave, but, rather, a living property of the mistress. So, Hagar the *shiftiah* of Sarai was legally given to Abram to bear a son for Sarai. Hagar is valued as a sexual object to

24 In Genesis 16, Abraham is called Abram, and Sarah is known as Sarai. It is only in Gen 17.5 that God renames them as Abraham and Sarah. The name Abram means "exalted father", while Abraham sounds similar to a Hebrew term meaning "father of many." Both Sarai and Sarah mean "princess."
25 G. Von Rad, *Genesis*. Translated by John H. Marks. (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1961), 186.
26 E. Tamez, *The Woman who Complicated the History of Salvation. New Eyes for Reading*, edited by John S. Pobee and Barbel von Wartenberg-Porter. (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone Books, 1986).
27 Patricia Shelly, "Hagar and the God-who-sees: Reflection on Genesis 16: 3-13," *The Conrad Grebel Review* 11 (1993): 265-268.
28 Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Genesis*. (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2008), 286.

be used by her "owners." This emphasizes her powerlessness in this story and her vulnerability to abuse, exploitation and violence.

According to James Okoye, "Hagar is seen as a possession, a disposable commodity that can exchange hands at the will of the owner. She does not need to be asked what she feels about the arrangement; her feelings are of no consequence in the transaction."[29] Hagar is silent in the entire narrative. Sarai and Abram never speak to Hagar directly. Hagar's silence is another sign of her powerlessness.

**Sarai**...In Genesis 16, Sarai is introduced in relation to her husband Abram, and as a "barren woman." Although Sarai seems to be running the affairs of this family, her experience of childlessness is the main focus of her household, as well as of her narrative. Thus, Sarai's problem has become a problem for the whole family, despite her being described as married, rich, and free. As a woman, she's still defined in terms of her social roles of wife and mother. This is where she gets her social "value" from. Therefore, childlessness becomes a trauma for Sarai. It drives her to abuse the defenseless Hagar. Sarai becomes jealous of the young fertile surrogate of her husband and attacks her. This story becomes focused on the victimization of Hagar. Phyllis Trible interprets the story based on the power that Sarai, the mistress, has over a slave, Hagar.[30] It underlines the fusions between power and powerlessness, which often lead to a cycle of violence.

In relation to the traditions and customs of Ancient Israel, a woman who was not able to have children was in a shameful situation. This woman would lack dignity and respect. She would become the laughing stock of other women! Sarai had two options: (1) to remain barren for the remainder of her life, tolerating shame, or until YHWH changed her circumstances; or (2) to present her own maid, Hagar, to Abram who would bear children on her behalf.[31] Sarai chose the second option, because she knew that the son born of Hagar would be regarded as her own. Sarai took the initiative with her husband, taking charge on the issue of offspring. According to Renita Weems:

[Sarai's] response reflects a typical response to the traumatic experience of infertility coupled with childlessness—a response of anger, frustration, and violence. And I suspect that Sarai's negative reaction to the success of Hagar's pregnancy is also linked to her own pain. Even before the birth, Hagar's growing belly is a visible reminder to Sarai that she cannot bear children and that her natural role is being filled by another. Hagar's pregnancy acts as a public confirmation of Sarai's painful reality and her decision to procreate through other means. It is a threat to her way of life and sense of self. And so when Hagar shows resentment toward Sarai, it upsets Sarai's equilibrium—this one part of life comes to taint all other experiences, spoiling her appreciation of the present and overwhelming her capacity to respond to

29 James C. Okoye, "Sarai and Hagar: Genesis 16 and 21," *Journal of the Study of the Old Testament* 32 no. 2 (2007): 167.
30 Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).
31 Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), 445.

Hagar with reasonable and appropriate measures.[32]

Sarai was a very determined woman! But in the process of changing destiny, she became very disappointed with Hagar. When Hagar became pregnant, her attitude toward Sarai changed. Renita Weems claims that the pregnancy awakened something in Hagar: her sense of self-worth, her sense of purpose and direction[33] as evident in verse 4b: "When she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress." Whatever the reason, Hagar could no longer see her relationship to Sarai her mistress in the same way as before. This change in Hagar threatened Sarai. Sarai's criticism of Abram in v. 5 may be understood as her response to his silence in the face of Hagar's taunts. Hagar seemed to sense she'd attained some degree of power, given her status as mother-to-be. And that threatened Sarai's own power in the household. Sarai's appeal to Abram indicates that he is responsible for generating Hagar's claim to motherhood and equal status.[34]

Abram's response that "Your slave-girl is in your power; do to her as you please" (v.6) results in Sarai dealing harshly with Hagar, to the extent that Hagar runs away from her. Abram seems to admit his responsibility and his lack of authority over Sarai's legal rights here. In spite of his power as patriarch, Abram acknowledges passively Sarai's appeal, and agrees to the legal authority that Sarai invokes. This indicates Abram's unwillingness to step in and resolve the conflict.

**Abram...**represents the patriarchal powers and structure of the First Testament operating within this text. In this particular story, Abram is the husband of Sarai. As the patriarch, he is characterized throughout Genesis 16 as passive. He follows Sarai's initial directive to sleep with his servant, and when conflict arises, he does not intervene. Abram is experiencing the pressure to fulfill the divine promise of descendants. He is personally affected by Sarai's infertility and the unfulfilled divine promise.

## Theological Reflection

Regardless of the exclusive nature of the culture in which Hagar exists, this story highlights the importance of each person in God's reign. Hagar symbolizes the continuation of God's promise of salvation and blessings to Abram/Abraham.

In the desert, God appeared to Hagar and promised that her son Ishmael would grow and be a "wild ass of a man," one who would not be dominated, or domesticated.[35] Neither would he be a slave like Hagar; rather he would be free in the desert. His hand would be against all, and all would be against him, but he could succeed in erecting his tent before all his siblings (vv. 11-12). All this confirmed the fact that God had seen and responded to Hagar's suffering. Hagar became the first woman in the Bible to be given the promise of numerous descendants. Hagar responded to God with a trusting spirit and faith. She confessed that God had come to her rescue: "You are El-roi, a God

32 Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego, CA: Lura Media), 1988.
33 Ibid.
34 E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Anchor Bible; Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1964).

35 E. Tamez, *The Woman who Complicated the History of Salvation. New Eyes for Reading*, ed. John S. Pobee and Barbel von Wartenberg-Porter (Oak Park, IL: Meyer Stone Books, 1986), 16-17.

of seeing" (v. 13). Hagar named the God whom she encountered through the messenger, "The God who saw me in my distress."[36] This name of God, El-Roi, occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures. It is Hagar's name for God, born of her own experience: that of having been given a future and a new hope. Hagar is the only person in the Hebrew Scriptures to give God a brand-new name.

Moreover, Hagar's confession and naming tell us that God has not exclusively committed Godself to Abram and Sarai; rather God heard (the meaning of Ishmael) Hagar in her misery and saw her suffering. God appeared to Hagar, conversed with her, and made promises to her that approximated those given to Abram. God is clearly shown as the protector of the oppressed and exploited here. Hagar's humanity is affirmed through her encounter with God. God promised Hagar that her son will be the leader of a great nation. The God of Hagar is for all people, not only those in power. Hagar becomes a "chosen one" of God – perhaps emphasizing that God chooses even those in very vulnerable and marginalized positions. God empowers and protects them.

The story of Hagar challenges Christians' lack of concern about issues of social injustice. It is a story of an outsider, being encountered and called by God. Her story clearly shows that God lifts up and works with those who are marginalized or victimized in families, churches and societies. This story reassures us that no one is an outcast to God and that God's social order is inclusive and ours should be too. The story of Hagar highlights the importance of each person in God's reign. It is a story that brings forth the message of inclusivity in the household of God. Regardless of our respective differences, we can all find comfort in God. According to Marina Hofman:

There is no doubt that Hagar's experiences—both the abuse and the divine intervention and affirmation—change Hagar. In facing her reality, Hagar is able to begin again, to live in the present, starting not from the beginning but from the point at which her life was disjointed. We may be uncomfortable that the angel sends Hagar back to her abuser; we may want a fair and just world where the angel will intervene in Hagar's situation and prevent any future abuse or mistreatment. But in Hagar's life—as in ours—the world is neither fair nor just. Hagar must return to Sarai, but she returns with a new sense of identity and an empowerment that comes not from an unjustified arrogance but from divine affirmation. Her future is not empty, but rather is filled with divine hope and purpose. She has seen God in the wilderness and returns a changed person.[37]

## A Contextual Reflection

The story of Hagar has parallels in the Samoan context, in the attitude among men and women that tends to contribute to gender-based violence against other women. This type of violence is a result of the inequality of power experienced by women in the environment in which they live and exist. The power and authority held by men

36 Claus Westermann, *Genesis*, trans. David E. Green (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987), 126.
37 Marina Hofman, "Retelling Hagar's Story: Reading Trauma in Genesis 16," *The Other Journal: An Intersection of Theology & Culture* 25 (2015). Retrieved from https://theotherjournal.com/2015/12/03/retelling-hagars-story-reading-trauma-in-genesis-16/

in Samoan society is part and parcel of patriarchal norms and values Samoans inherited from Hebrew Scriptures. In fact, patriarchy continues to control gender relationships in Samoan society. One clear example of these gendered power inequalities is in the treatment of a *nofotane* (wife) within her husband's family. Arguably, the experiences of *nofotane* can be explained from the perspective of trauma. In Genesis 16: 1-16, the actions of Sarai and Hagar are consistent with the responses of trauma victims and this lens may also help to explain the response of Abram and the community.[38] Consequently, feelings of irritability, anger, and violence are normal responses to trauma, as victims fight to remain in control, and this is precisely the response we see in Sarai's subsequent victimization of Hagar.[39] Abram's silence can also be viewed as his struggle to maintain his own power and control as patriarch over Sarai and Hagar.

## Using the Story of Hagar to Raise Awareness of Gender-Based Violence Against Women (GBVAW)

In the small groups, ask a volunteer to read the exchange between Sarai and Abram, then reflect on the questions below to capture the experiences articulated in the words used by Sarai and Abram:

You see that the Lord has prevented me from bearing **children**; go into **my slave-girl**; it may be that I shall obtain **children** by her. May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave **my slave-girl** to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!

Your **slave-girl** is in your power; do to her as you please.

1. What sort of experience is conveyed in the exchange between Sarai and Abram?
2. What is Sarai's main concern here?
3. In this exchange, Hagar's name is not mentioned, but she is identified twice by Sarai as "my slave girl" and by Abraham as "your slave girl." How might labels or identifications such as these contribute to GBVAW in Samoa and other societies?
4. "Transferring the blame" is a common tactic used by perpetrators of GBVAW. Do you see this happening in your community?

Ask the reporter for each small group to share the group's responses for the whole group. This can be communicated through a role play, song, or any other method chosen by the group. The facilitator will summarise the responses on whiteboard or newsprint.

## Questions for Further Reflection

*In the light of questions below, encourage participants to reflect on their own experiences. How has this story enabled them to think beyond the surface level in their relationships in families, society, and religious institutions.*

38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.

1. Are there any specific examples from your own community that relate to the story of Hagar?
2. Can you identify the types of GBVAW happening in the text?
3. Can you give examples of GBVAW from your community?
4. How can you address these forms of violence in public?
5. Name the contributing factors to GBVAW in your community.

## From Awareness to Action

In gaining awareness through discussions, dialogue and naming the problem, the participants can also move on to identify specific actions to be taken to raise the public's awareness on GBVAW. In addition, the participants should also name practical ways to continue the process of action and reflection relevant within the Samoan context. For example, representatives of NGOs and other professionals who have expertise in dealing with [GBVAW] could be invited to visit churches, where workshops could be held that are open to the public. Information about the root causes of domestic violence and its devastating effects on victims could be presented in a non-threatening way, as a compassionate practice of *alofa/agape*.[40] Examples of real incidents of GBVAW (with pseudonyms) can be used as case studies with participants critically analysing them and suggesting restorative alternatives to avoid violence.

40 Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "Public Theology, Core Values and Domestic Violence in Samoan Society." Phd thesis (University of Otago: Dunedin, 2015).

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# O Le Tosoga Fa'amalosi O Tamara

*Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko*

**2 Samuelu 13:1-22 O LE TOSOGA FA'AMALOSI O TAMARA.... (O MANU'A FA'A-LOTOIFALE)**

**TAITAI:** (Fa'amatala le fa'asologa o le tala: fuafua lelei se nofoaga talafeagai, fa'atāua le va-fealoa'i, ma ia maua le lagona o le fa'atuatuaina ina ia sa'oloto tagata uma e fa'asoa)

**FAITAU LE TUSI PAIA IA FA'APEI O LO'O FAI SE TALANOAGA (NRSV)...**

*Filifili mai nisi se to'alima mai ia i latou o lo'o auai i le mafutaga e faitau ma fa'aleoina upu ma lagona o Ionatapa, Amanono, Tavita, Tamara ma Apisaloma, ma se isi to'atasi e avea ma fa'amatala'upu o le tala, e pei ona tusia i le Tusi Paia.*

**[Fa'amatala'upu]:** Sa i ai le tuafafine o le atali'i o Tavita o Apisaloma, o le tama'ita'i lalelei lava, o lona igoa o Tamara; ma sa mana'o i ai le isi atali'i o Tavita o Amanono. Sa avea le mana'o o Amanono i lona tuafafine o Tamara ua fai ma ala ua fa'anoanoa ai, ma ua i'u ai lava ina ma'i; auā o Tamara o le taupou ma ua ia lē mafai ai ona ia faia se mea ia te ia. Peitai, sa iai se tasi uo a Amanono e igoa ia Ionatapa, o le atali'i o le uso o Tavita e igoa ia Sama; peitai, o Ionatapa, o le tagata fai togafiti poto tele.

**(Ionatapa-Amanono):** O oe o le atali'i o le tupu, ae aisea ua e tino vale ai i lea aso ma lea aso? E te le ta'u mai ea ia te a'u?

**(Amanono-Ionatapa):** Ua ou mana'o ia Tamara, le tuafafine o lo'u uso o Apisaloma.

**(Ionatapa-Amanono):** Vaai oe, taoto i lou moega, ma e fa'atagā ma'i; ma, a sau lou tamā e asi mai oe, ona e fai lea i ai, 'Se'i sau lava Tamara lo'u tuafafine e aumai sa'u mea e ai, ma laulau mai i o'u luma, ina ia ou iloa ai, ma ia fafaga mai ia te a'u.'

**(Amanono-Tavita):** Malie lou loto, se'i tuli mai lo'u tuafafine o Tamara ma ni nai fasi-keke ma a'u, ma sau se'i fafaga a'u.

**(Tavita-Tamara):** Sau e alu i le fale o lou tuagane o Amanono, ma tapena sana mea'ai.

**(Amanono-Tamara):** Aumai le mea'ai i totonu o lo'u potu, ma e sau e fafaga a'u... Lo'u tuafafine e, sau ia, ta te momoe ma a'u.

**(Tamara-Amanono):** 'Aua, lo'u tuagane e, 'aua e te toso ia te a'u, auā e lē faia fa'apea i Isaraelu; 'aua le faia lena mea leaga! O a'u fo'i, e fa'apēfea ona ou fa'ate'a o lo'u luma; a o oe, e tusa ma se ulavale o Isaraelu; o lenei se'i lua talanoa ma le tupu auā na te lē taofia a'u mai ia te oe.

**(Amanono-Tamara):** Tula'i ia, inā alu ese atu ia ma a'u!

**(Tamara-Amanono):** 'Aua, lo'u tuagane e; o le mea sesē ua e faia – E lē sili ea ona leaga o lou tuliga o a'u i fafo nai lo le mea ua e faia ia te a'u'.

**(Amanono-'Au'auna):** 'Ave ia i fafo o lenei fafine ai ia te a'u ma fa'amau le faitoto'a o i tua.

**(Apisaloma-Tamara):** Sa ia te oe ea Amanono lou tuagane? O lenei, lo'u tuafafine e, ina fa'alologo ia oe, auā o lou tuagane o ia, 'aua e te toe mafaufau i le mea ua tupu.

**[Fa'amatala'upu]:** Ona nofo fua ai lea o Tamara i le fale o lona tuagane o Apisaloma. Ua fa'alogo Tavita le tupu i nei mea uma, ona ita tele ai lea o ia, peitai ua ia lē a'oa'i ia Amanono, auā ua ia alofa ia te ia, ma o ia fo'i o lana ulumatua. A o Apisaloma, ua lē mafai ona tautala atu o ia i se upu leaga poo se upu lelei ia Amanono; auā ua ia 'ino'ino ia Amanono, ina ua na toso ia Tamara lona tuafafine.

## ULUA'I ILOILOGA O LE TALA ...

*Ia manatunatu lelei i fesili ua tuuina atu i lalo. Fa'atalatalanoa fesili nei i ni vaega to'aitiiti ona tuuina ane lea o le aotelega o finagalo fa'aalia i luma o le vaitele. Ia fa'amalamalama e lē o lo'o ta'ita'ia le iloiloga ni fa'amatalaga (tuā 'ele'ele) e uiga i le tusi faitau.*

1. O le ā le mea o lo'o fa'amatala e le tala?
2. O ai tagata 'autū o le tala, a'o ā fo'i ni o latou sao taua i le tala?
3. O ā ni matā'upu taua o lo'o mafai ona atagia mai le tala?

## MANATU AOAO O LE TUSI FAITAU ...

O le tala lenei e uiga i se tosoga fa'amalosi i totonu lava o le aiga o le tupu o Tavita. O **Amanono** o le ulumatua o atali'i uma o Tavita. O lona tina o Ainoama. O le tosoga e Amanono o le tamaita'i la te tinā eseese ae tamā fa'atasi, o le ata manino lea o ituaiga sosaiete o lo'o pulea malosi e le itupa o ali'i, ma e manatu lava latou o la latou faitalia e fa'aaogāina ai tino o tamaita'i i so'o se mea e manana'o i ai. O le tosoga e Amanono o lona tua-teine (tamā fa'atasi), mulimuli ane ua toe 'ino'ino i ai, ma i'u ai lava ina ia tulia i fafo e ola ma lona luma i lona olaga ato'a; e aunoa ma le ta'uina i se tasi.[41] O le mea moni lava, o Amanono o le ata lafo'ia lea o lona tamā o Tavita aemaise o ana mea na fai i nisi o tina i totonu o le si'omaga e malosi ai leo ma pulea e ali'i (silasila i le afaina ai o le tina ia Patisepa i le 2 Samuelu 11-12). O le isi tagata 'autū o Ionatapa, o le atali'i o le uso o Tavita o Sama. O **Ionatapa** o le tagata fai togafiti poto. Na ia fautuaina Amanono i le auala e fa'asesē ai Tavita, ina ia mafai ona ia (Amanono) maua se taimi na'o laua ai ma Tamara. O **Tamara** o le afafine o le tupu o Tavita. E iloa Tamara i le tala nei o le tuafafine o Apisaloma. O ia (Tamara) lea sa tosoina, fa'aleagaina ma ua sauāina ona o le malosi o faiga ma le aganu'u a Eperu, lea e pulea e ali'i.

O **Tavita** le isi tagata o lo'o ta'ua i le tala, peita'i e foliga mai e leai ma sona leo. O le leai o sona leo i le mea na tupu, o le fa'ailoga lena o lona lagolagoina o faiga ma aga masani i pulega fa'a-ali'i. O le leai fo'i o se leo o Tavita ua ia tatala ai le avanoa mo Apisaloma e ola ai peisea'ī o se tagata o lo'o naunau e saili le mea moni ma le amiotonu ona o lona tuafafine o Tamara. Peita'i, o lona lagona moni o lo'o nātia, o le fa'asili'aupule ma le gaupule, lona uiga ua manatu e sili atu lana pule nai lo lona uso o Amanono ma lona tamā o Tavita. O le tala lenei o lo'o aumai ai se fe'au taua mo tina (poo le ā lava le ituaiga soifuaga o soifua ai) o ē ua masani ona fa'aaogaina e fai ma 'alofaga o nisi, ma ua avea ma mea fa'amālie mana'o o le itupa o ali'i. O le taunu'uga o ituaiga faiga fa'apenei, e i'u ai lava ina talia e tina o se vaega lava o lo latou soifuaga le sauāina ma le lē lagona o latou leo, aemaise lava le manatu ia maopoopo 'āiga ma nu'u. O nisi atunu'u e pei o Samoa, e ala ona sauāina nisi ona e mafua i le manatu o le

41 Musa Muneja, "Cakes, Rape and Power Games: A Feminist Reading of the Story of Tamar (2 Samuel 13: 1-22), *BOLESWA Journal of Theology*, Religion and Philosophy 1, no. 2 (Dec. 2006): 83.

tama lea a'o le teine lea (o lo'o fa'aigoaina e nisi o sauaga fa'alotoifale poo sauaga e fa'asaga i tina ma tama'ita'i) o se ata e matua manino ai le lē tutusa/paleni o le fa'asoaina o le malosi/pule i le va o ali'i ma tama'ita'i.

I le tala ia Tamara o se tala i le *toso-teine* ma e tutusa lelei ma le *mata'ifale* aemaise le sauāina o tina ma tama'ita'i. "I le gagana Eperu o lo'o tusia ai le Tusi Paia, ... o le upu *toso-teine*, e mafai ona aofia ai i totonu a'afiaga o le mafaufau, poo le tino, poo le sa'olotoga, aemaise lava pe afai sa fa'aaogaina le tulaga o le toso fa'amalosi e aunoa ma le loto malie poo ioe i ai o se tamaita'i."[42] O se tasi o va'aiga maofa i le tala lenei, o le Fa'amatalaina e le tusitala o le malosi fa'atamatane o Amanono na ia fa'amalosia ai Tamara: "Ae le mafai o ia ona fa'alogo i lana upu, na ia fa'amalosi ia te ia, ma na toso ia te ia, ua momoe fo'i ma ia (13:14).[43] O le Fa'amatalaga lenei e fa'ailoa ai e lē gata sa fa'aaogaina e Amanono lona malosi'aga fa'atamatane e fa'amalosi ai Tamara e ui lava sa te'ena e Tamara Amanono mai lona fa'atinoina o nei uiga ma amioga matagā. Sa manuia lava taumafaiga a Amanono auā e sili lona malosi nai lo Tamara ma na te le'i fa'alogo pe amana'ia si leo musu o Tamara.[44] O le Fa'amatalaina auiliili e le tusitala o le luma o Tamara ina ua mae'a ona toso ia te ia (vv. 14-19: "ma ua alu atu, ua tagi auē fano") e le tau fesiligia ai i le manatu o le tagata faitau, sa fa'atino se faigā'āiga fai fa'amalosi (toso-teine).[45]

E ui lava i se manatu o Tamara e tatau ona nonofo ma Amanono (v. 16, cf. Esoto 22:16; Teuterenome 22:8), peitai sa tuliesea o ia ma ua fa'alumaina (vs. 15, 17-18) ma sa vave ona o'o ane ia te ia lagona o le fa'anoanoa. O le saeia o lona ofu talaloa, o le lā'ei e fa'ailoa ai o ia o se alo tama'ita'i o le tupu ma o le taupou fo'i, o le fa'ailoga o le tagata ua feagai ma tiga, ua sili atu ona ogaoga nai lo le pa'ū o lona teine muli (taupou), ua ia asu a'e fo'i le efuefu i lona ulu ma fa'ae'e ane ona lima i luga o lona ulu (cf. Ier 2:37). O Tavita, e tusa ai ma le fuaiupu e 21, sa lagona lona ita ina ua ia fa'alogo i le mea ua tupu, "peitai na te le'i fa'asala i lona atali'i o Amanono, auā na ia alofa ia ta ia, ona o lana ulumatua." Ai o le lagona faitama fa'avalea lea o Tavita ia Amanono na afua ai le lē fiafia o Apisaloma, peitai na ia onosai se'ia se aso (v. 22).

Sa iai se taupulepulega 'autasi ma se *faufauga* i nisi e fa'asaga i lē ua agasala (Ionatapa ma, e le'i māfaufauina fo'i e auai ma Tavita) ma o se 'autasiga fo'i ina ia 'aua lava nei aliali le mea na tupu (Apisaloma ma Tavita). Mulimuli ane, sa matuā aliali le taui ma sui (Apisaloma), peitai o lea taui ma sui mata'utia sa faia lava e aunoa ma se sao o lē na a'afia. O le faiga uma o tonu ma talanoaga i mea na tutupu i le tala lenei, sa augapiu lava ma se leo o Tamara, ua na'o ona tuagane lava ma lona tamā sa auai. I le 2 Samuelu 13: 31, o lo'o tā'ua ai le tamā o tagata 'autū o le tala e to'atolu, fa'atasi ai ma ana auauna, sa o latou saei i o latou ofu, fetagisi ma auē "ua matuā tiga" i aso uma, ua lē ona o lē na a'afia, a ona o lē na toso-teine ma le uso o le toso-teine.[46] Ona o le malosi o le leo ma pulega fa'a-augātamā (ali'i), ua foliga mai ai o le a'afia o Tamara i le faigā-

[42] Abasili, "Was it Rape? The David and Bathssheba Pericope Re-examined," 14.
[43] Abasili, "Was it Rape? The David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-examined," 14.
[44] S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*. JSOTSup (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 265.
[45] M. Gray, "Amnon: A Chip Off the Old Block? Rhetorical Strategy in 2 Sm 13:7-15: The Rape of Tamar and the Humiliation of the Poor," *JSOT* 77 (1998): 43-44.
46 Fred Nyabera & Taryn Montgomery, *Contextual Bible Study Manual on Gender-Based Violence* (Nairobi: FECCLAHA, 2007), 26.

'āiga fai fa'amalosi, ua lē afaina lea, ma ua avea ai o se tali fo'i lea a Tamara ma lona aiga. E pei fo'i ona ta'ua e Esther Fuchs e fa'apea:

> E mafai ona finauina e fa'apea, pe ana leai le malosi o leo ma pulega fa'a-augātamā (ali'i) lea na afua ai ona usitai le taupou o Tamara ona o le fa'atonuga a ona tuagane ma lona tamā, se mea manu lava e le alu Tamara i le fale o Amanono. O le afaina ai o Tamara i le mea na tupu e le'i fa'ato'ā tupu ina ua fa'amalosi e Amanono ia Tamara, peitai, na amata mai ina ua fa'atonu e lona tamā o Tavita e alu i le fale o Amanono e tapena se mea'ai ma lona tuagane sa fa'atagā ma'i. E le'i muta lona afaina auā sa fa'atonu fo'i e lona tuagane (Apisaloma) ona o lana puipuiga fa'atuagane ina ia "'aua nei tautala." Afai o lea na faoa e Amanono le teine muli/taupou o Tamara, ua fāoa fo'i e Apisaloma le avanoa e tautala ai Tamara. Ma e foliga mai e tele nisi auala sa lē māfaufauina e fa'aono afaina ai Tamara mai le puipuiga a lona tuagane "lelei," peitai ua sili ona ogaoga lana tā nai lo uiga matagā sa faia ia te ia e lona tuagane "leaga."[47]

## TUĀ'ELE'ELE O LE TUSI FAITAU ...

O le leai o se leo o le tamā lenei o Tavita, ua fa'ailoa ai lona lē mafaia ona a'oa'i lona atali'i o Amanono. O le ituaiga lē tautala lenei e ta'ua o le fa'aufiufi, poo se gaioiga fo'i ua fai lava ma le mautinoa ina ia tanuma'i i lalo o se fala, ma le fa'amoemoe ia 'aua nei aliali. O le upu moni o le mea lea e ta'ua o le lē faia o le amiotonu. O le solitulafono a Amanono o le ata moni lea o le ituaiga tagata e iai Tavita. E taua tele mo le silafia, o le leai o se leo o Tavita, o le mafuaaga fo'i lea o le leai o se leo o Apisaloma ma afua ai ona ia taumafai fo'i ia Tamara ia aua nei tautala. O le taotaomia o leo e i'u ai ina tali atu i le fa'ao'olima ma le fasioti tagata fa'amoemoeina. O le tala lenei o lo'o fa'ailoa ai o le aiga o se nofoaga e tatau lava ona matuā aliali ai le alofa, le puipuiga ma le malu o Tamara a ua avea ma nofoaga ua fa'alataina ai o ia ma sauāina ai. O lo'o fa'amanatu mai fo'i i le tala lenei, o le sauāina o tina ma tama'ita'i e mafai lava ona tupu i totonu o soo se aiga. O Amanono, o le atali'i o Tavita mai ia Ainoama, sa mana'o ia Tamara , o le tuafafine moni o Apisaloma, o le fanau a Tavita ia Maka.[48] O lona mana'o tele ia Tamara na afua ai ona ia manatu e fa'atagā ma'i, ma o'o ai loa ina fau e lona tausoga o Ionatapa se togafiti (v. 3-5). Ona o le malu lelei o le puipuiga o teine taupou, sa leai ai se avanoa e va'ai ai Amanono ia Tamara (v. 3), peitai na ia talosaga ia Tavita ina ua asiasi atu ia te ia o le aloalii, ina ia auina atu Tamara ia te ia ma ia fa'amalosia loa. Na ia le taliaina lana augani ane, ina ua ia fa'ailoa iai a'afiaga ogaoga o i laua uma e o'o i ai; e foliga mai sa mafai ona toe nonofo se tane ma sona tuafafine e eseese o la tina (cf. Kenese 20:12), e ui mulimuli ane ua tapu i le tulafono (Levitiko 18:9; 20:17; Teuterenome 27:22). O le mea moni sa limataitaiina le mana'o o Amanono e lona malosi fa'atane ae lē o se alofa, na iloa ina ua mulimuli ane toe 'ino'ino ia Tamara.

## FE'AU FA'ALEAGAGA MAI LE TUSI FAITAU...

O le taimi lava e tutupu ai sauaga, ua tatou tu'ufesili fo'i, "o fea ea o i ai le Atua?" O le fesili fo'i lea o lo'o fesili ai le tala lenei ia Tamara. O le mea moni, e ui lava o le Atua

47 Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman.* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 205.

48 Ibid.

auai, ae na te aumaia faitalia i le tagata, ma e mafai fo'i ona tatou faia ni fa'ai'uga e le lelei ma o'o ai lava ina solia ma olopalaina tina ma tama'ita'i aemaise lava i latou e faigofie ona afaina. O ituaiga fa'ai'uga fa'apenei e masani ona aliali ma fai e i latou o lo'o pulea isi tagata, aemaise lava i tina ma tama'ita'i. O Amanono, Ionatapa, Tavita ma Apisaloma sa tafilisaunoa i le ituaiga pule malosi lea, ma o le pule fo'i lea sa limataitaiina ai mea uma sa o latou faia. O a latou fa'atinoga nei e i'u ai ina pogisa ai ma la latou vaai i le Atua. E maua fo'i ituaiga manatu fa'apito nei ma le nanau i le pule i totonu o le siosiomaga o tatou ola ma soifua ai. A feagai loa ma ituaiga fa'aosoosoga nei, ona lu'itauina loa lea o i tatou o Kerisiano ina ia taofimau a tatou aga tausili fa'a-kerisiano o le alofa, agalelei ma ia faia le amiotonu i tagata uma, ina ia mafai ona lavea'iina tagata uma.

## FESO'OTAIGA O LE TALA MA LE ASŌ...

E ui lava o le tala lenei o lo'o fa'ailoa ai nisi mea na tupu i Isaraelu i le fia tausaga ua tuana'i, peitai e le ese ma mea o tutupu i le siosiomaga o tatou ola ma soifua ai i le asō. O se tala o lo'o fa'aalia ai nisi o mea o tutupu ma o lo'o feagai ai ma nisi i o tatou lava siosiomaga. I su'esuega a le Matagaluega o Tina ma Tama'ita'i, ma Atina'e Manuia o Nu'u (MWCSD) o lo'o atagia ai e fa'apea:

> e masani ona aliae ni sauaga i totonu o aiga pe afai e le manino ma iloa tonu poo a nafa ma aga tausili. Mo se fa'ataitaiga, e ala ona sauā le tane i lana avā ona e le fa'aaloalo lana avā i lona tina. O ituaiga faiga ia ua masani ai nisi aiga, ma ua avea ai lava o se mea ua latou taliaina o le vaega o lo latou soifuaga fa'a-Samoa. A'o ituaiga amioga sauā nei, e le o se vaega o le aganu'u a Samoa. Peitai, ua fa'aaoga e tane o se avanoa e fa'aali ai la latou pule sauā ma le pule malosi i a latou avā.[49]

O le faitauina o le tala lenei ia Tamara ua manino mai ai nisi o mea e mafai ona tutupu i totonu o Samoa. O se tala e mafai ona fa'amanino maia nisi o itu pogisa o mea moni o lo'o tutupu i totonu o aiga, nu'u fa'apea le ekalesia o lo'o tatou ola ma soifua ai. O Tamara o se "alo tama'ita'i o le tupu" e "atamai, lototele ma (ua matuā noatia o ia e fa'asoa ona mafatiaga),"[50] peita'i sa le'i mafai e lona atamai ona lavea'i ia te ia mai le fa'alumaina ma le matagā. E leai lava ma se eseesega ma tina ma tama'ita'i Samoa o lo'o feagai ma sauaga ma le fa'alumaina ma i'u ai fo'i ina toe tu'ua'ia i latou i mea na tutupu ia i latou.

O lo'o manino i su'esuega a le Matagaluega (MWCSD) le si'itia ai o le fuainumera o sauaga fa'asaga i tina ma tama'ita'i mai le 46% i le 2000 i le 60% i le 2017. I totonu lava ia o Samoa, ua avea le tutupu so'o o sauaga fa'apenei ua manatu ai o se vaega masani o le soifuaga i aiga le sauāina o tina ma tama'ita'i, ma ua ta'atele ia ituaiga sauaga.[51] O le su'esuega a le Matagaluega (MWCSD) ua fa'amautinoa ai nisi o vaega o lo'o mafai ona tofu sao i le sauāina ai o tina ma tama'ita'i: "misa ona o fanau (26%), le fiafia le tamā ona o le amio a le tina i le va ma lona aiga (fa'ata'itaiga. vaai maualalo i lona aiga) (18%); lē gaua'i o le tina i le tane (14%), ma le lē fa'amalieina o le tane i le gaioi a le tina i totonu o lona aiga (12%)."[52] Sa fa'ailoa e le Matagaluega (MWCSD) i a latou

49 MWCSD, (2017): 12.
50 Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-feminist Readings of Biblical Narrative* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 37.
51 Mataafa Keni Lesa, "Domestic Violence, a Coward and Speaking Up," *Samoa Observer*, February 18, 2014.
52 MWCSD, xviii.

su'esuega nisi o vaega nei e mafua ai sauaga i Samoa:

> O lē na a'afia o se tina ua 24 tausaga le matua ma lana fanau teine to'alua, ma e nonofo i le aiga o lona to'alua. Na fa'aipoipo i le tausaga lava lea na i'u mai ai mai le aoga maualuga. O lona to'alua e 28 tausaga le matua ma o se inisinia. O e o lo'o nonofo fa'atasi i le aiga o lona to'alua e aofia ai ona matua, o ona tuafafine e to'afa ma o latou taito'alua ma a latou fanau. E alu lava le tamāloa e faigaluega ae tu'u lona to'alua ma lana fanau i lona aiga. Ua amata ona sauāina lagona o le tina nei e le tina ma le tuafafine o lona to'alua. Ua 'au fa'atasi ma fa'asaga-tau atu ia te ia, ua amata ona lalau e le'o ia o se to'alua lelei. Ua le masino fo'i le taua'ifusu ma le aiga o lana tane. Ua i'u ina 'au lona to'alua i lona aiga ma ua oo lava ina fa'aoolima ia te ia. Ua sili atu ona alofa lona to'alua i ona matua ma ona tuafafine nai lo ia. Peitai, na te malamalama lelei i le pogai tonu o le tutupu o nei mea uma: ua le fiafia le aiga o lona to'alua ona ua ia iloaina le mataifale o le aiga o lona to'alua. O lo'o aafia ai le tamā o lona to'alua ua toe nonofo lava ma lona afafine-fai. E pei lava o le tulaga masani, o le mataifale ma le sauāina e o fa'atasi, ma o mea na tutupu i lē na sauāina o lo'o atagia mai ai le mea moni o lo'o tupu pea i totonu o aiga ma o se numi lea i le va o aiga ma tagata taito'atasi. Ua manatu ua tatau ia te ia ona alu ese ina ia sa'oloto mai ai i sauaga tuufa'asolo i totonu o le aiga.[53]

A fua i ai i le fa'atuputupula'ia pea o mataupu e fa'atatau i le sauāina o tina ma tama'ita'i e aofia ai ma le mataifale), ua tatau nei loa ona taliaina e Samoa o lo'o sauaina tagata i totonu o ona lava lotoifale ma ioeina o sauaga i totonu o aiga ua foliga mai lava o se mea ua masani mai a'i Samoa i le soifuaga o aso uma.[54] O le itu e sili ona fa'anoanoa ai, ua solomusa lava i ekalesia o se tasi o poutu malosi ma le fa'aaloalogia e mafai ona latou faia ni suiga, peitai, ua le gata ua sāō mai sauaga i totonu o aiga, a ua latou auai fo'i ma latou. A le o le taumafai e puipui i latou o lo'o agasala poo le taumafai e ufiufi ma moeiini mata i sauaga nei o lo'o alia'e i totonu o ekalesia.[55]

E pei lava o Isaraelu anamua, sa fausia ma limataitaiina lava Samoa e ona augātamā ma o se tulaga lava sa masani mai ai aemaise i pulega ma le va nonofo ai i totonu o aiga ma nu'u. O faiga masani ia ua mafai ona manatu ai o le sauaina o tina ma tama'ita'i, o mea lava e masani mai ai le olaga. E gata i lea, ua oo lava i le Mataupu Silisili ma le fa'auigaga o le Tui Paia, ua latou fa'aauau lava o ni faiga masani e pei ona tauave mai ai e augātamā. O le fa'auigaga masani o fuaitau ma tala o le Tusi Paia, ua fa'aaogaina pea e fai ma 'alofaga o le pule sauā a alii i tina ma tama'ita'i aemaise lo latou taumafai e fa'aaoga le sauā e "a'oa'i" ai tina ma fanau. E le gata ua suia ai le agaga moni o le tala o i

53 Ministry of Women Community and Social Development, *2017 Samoa Family Safety Study* (Apia: MWCSD, 2017), 98.
54 Mine Pase, "Gospel and Culture Samoan Style," in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania*, ed. Lydia Johnson and Joan Filemoni-Tofeano (Suva, Fiji: Weavers/SPATS and Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2003), 72.
55 Filemoni-Tofaeono and Johnson discuss this reality in the context of various types of abuse occurring on the campus of an island theological school, all of which were minimised or ignored by those in authority. See Joan Filemoni-Tofeano and Lydia Johnson, *Reweaving the Relational Mat: A Christian Response to Violence Against Women from Oceania* (London: Equinox Press, 2006), Chapter 6, "The Praxis of Violence Against Women in the Oceanian Theological School Setting," 124-138.

le Tusi Paia, a ua lagolagoina ai le lē paleni o le pule i le va o le tane ma le tina.[56] I ekalesia Samoa:

> o fa'auigaga masani lava mai augatama o le Tusi Paia o lo'o tumau pea ma e lē fesiligia. O le lē lu'iina o nei faiga ua masani ai ma le fa'auigaina o le Tusi Paia ... o se sao fo'i lea i le fa'afitauli o le sauāina o tina ma tama'ita'i... Ona o ituaiga faiga masani nei ua leva, ua atili fa'amalosia ai le taotaomia pea o tulaga o nai tina ma tama'ita'i.[57]

## FA'AAOGAINA O LE TALA IA TAMARA E AUALA ATU AI SE FE'AU INA IA TAOFIA LOA SAUAGA E FA'ASAGA I TINA MA TAMA'ITA'I...

*I totonu o vaega (kulupu) laiti, talosaagaina se to'atasi e ofo mai na te faitauina le parakalafa o lo'o i lalo, pe faitau fa'alua pe sili atu fo'i:*

> O le tala ia Tamara o se tala e fetaui mo aso nei. O Tamara sa faia i ai ni sauaga matagā, e le i afaina mai se tagata e lē masani ai, *a'o lē na te iloa lelei.* O le afaina o Tamara e lē o se mea na tupu mai i se isi siosiomaga e ese mai lona aiga poo lima fo'i o se tagata ese, a o le *tagata o lona lava aiga* i totonu o lona fale. Ua afaina Tamara ona o se tasi o ona uiga tausa'afia — o lona agalelei, o le *mausali o lona usitai ona o aga ua masani ai* tama'ita'i aemaise o tu sa ao'a'oina ai o ia mai lava i lona laititi, ia iloa tausi le va ma isi tagata. Sa fa'apea atu Tamara e "'Aua" ma e *le i fa'aaloaloina lana "Aua'.* Ina ua saili fesoasoani Tamara *sa fa'atonuina o ia e 'aua nei tautala.* O se taumafaiga i se auala ina ia taunu'u ma fa'atino ai le amiotonu ma le saogalemu, ua *matuā aveesea mai ona lima a ua pule ai lona tuagane.* E le'o i ai ma se isi tina o tā'ua i le tala na lagona se leo pe na o'o ane e lavea'i Tamara. E foliga mai o se mataupu e patino i le itupa o alii; ma e mulimuli ane, o lē na tagi fano ma fa'anoanoa ai lona tama, o lona tuagane na faia sauaga ia te ia ae lē o ia. O le mea moni lava, ua *i'u le tala ia Tamara e aunoa ma ia.*[58]

**Fa'atalanoa fesili o lo'o i lalo e feso'otai i le tala:**

1. Fa'amata o ta'atele ituaiga sauaga nei fa'asaga i tina ma tama'ita'i ona o le itupa o ali'i i totonu o aiga ma nu'u o silafia e tina?

2. Ua tāmau lava le aganu'u lenei o le usita'i o tina ma tama'ita'i, e pei fo'i o Tamara; e fa'apēfea ona avea lea itu ma ala e solia ma sauāina ai latou e le itupa o alii?

3. Sa le i mafai e Tamara ona tete'e atu, sa leai ma se leo, ma o se tulaga fo'i o lona taumafai e tali atu i le mea ua tupu, sa i lima lava o lona tuagane. E fa'apēfea ona fa'afesootai le vaega lea ma le tu a Samoa o le feagaiga a le tuagane lona tuafafine e pei ona ta'ua i lalo?

4. O taumafai ea tuagane e puipuia mai o latou tuafafine mai sauaga e mafua ona o ia o se teine po'o se tama?

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56 Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "Public Theology, Core Values, and Domestic Violence in Samoan Society" (Phd thesis: University of Otago, Dunedin, 2015), 292-3.

57 Filemoni-Tofaeono and Johnson, *Reweaving the Relational Mat*, 96.

58 Nyabera & Montgomery, *Contextual Bible Study Manual*, 26.

5. E mafai ea e tuagane, e pei o Apisaloma, ona latou fa'atinoina se auala e taui ma sui ai (poo le amiotonu) ona o latou tuafafine?

6. E fa'amata e tatau ona fa'amalosia lea faiga, po ua o se auala e taomia ai leo o tina ma tama'ita'i, ae le tuu le avanoa ia i latou e finauina ai e i latou le mea tonu e tatau ona fai?

*Tatalo i taitai o vaega laiti taitasi e fa'asoa ane a latou tali i luma pe a potopoto fa'atasi. E tatau i lē o lo'o taitaia le talanoaga ona ia tapenaina se tāaofaiga o tali uma na fa'asoa ane mai vaega laiti uma ma ia tusia i luga o se laupapa poo ni nusipepa.*

**FESILI AUĀ NISI FA'ASOA...**

*[Afai e lava se taimi, ona fa'asoa fa'atasi lea o tagata uma i fesili ua taua. A leai, ia fautuaina sui auai uma a maua se avanoa ona latou manatunatu lea i fesili nei pe a ta'ape.]*

1. O mafai e fa'ataitaiga ia na e matauina mai lou lava siosiomaga ona toe fafagu ia te oe le tala ia Tamara?
2. O a nisi vaega poo ituaiga sauaga fa'asaga i tina ma tama'ita'i o lo'o taatele i lou lava aiga ma lou siosiomaga?
3. O a nisi mafuaaga o lo'o avea ma ala e sauāina ai tina ma tama'ita'i i le siosiomaga o e i ai?
4. O a ituaiga suiga o moomia i totonu o lau ekalesia ina ia fa'afaigofie ai ona fa'ailoa le fa'afitauli o sauaga fa'asaga i tina ma tama'ita'i?
5. O le a sou finagalo e uiga i le fuaitau, "ua i'u lava le tala ia Tamara e aunoa ma ia", ae fa'apēfea ona feso'otai ma sauaga e fa'asaga i tina ma tama'ita'i i totonu o lou lava aiga?

**FA'ATINOGA O LE MALAMALAMA UA MAUA ...**

Mai lo latou malamalama ua maua mai e ala i fefa'asoaiiga i totonu o vaega laiti fa'atasi ai ma le lautele, ia fausia loa ma fa'ailoa ni auala talafeagai e tatau ona fa'atino e i latou uma sa auai, ina ia fa'alauiloa ai le mataupu o le sauāina o tina ma tama'ita'i i totonu o ekalesia, aiga ma nu'u. E fa'aono agai i latou e toe fa'aolaola le taua o aga tausili e pei o le fa'aaloalo, alofa ma le fa'amaoni ina ia fesoasoani ai i tina ma tama'ita'i ua afaina ona o sauaga i totonu o aiga, aemaise ai fo'i le fesoasoani atu ia i latou sa fa'atinoina sauaga. E fautuaina fo'i faife'au ina ia fa'atautaia nisi o su'esuega i tala o le Tusi Paia mo tagata lotu i totonu o le nu'u, ma ia fa'aauauina pea le laugaina ma talatalanoa aemaise lava tulaga mana'oga i le vave tatau ona fai se suiga i le soifua feso'otai o tagata aua le manuia au i luma o tagata uma.

# The Rape of Tamar

*Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko*

## 2 Samuel 13: 1-22, The Rape of Tamar.... (Violence from Within)

### Key Objectives

- To raise awareness of the story of Tamar as a biblical text.
- To promote a thoughtful and informed discussion of challenges raised by the story and to explore its themes of power, gender inequality, and rape.
- To connect the text with experiences today and consider how the church should respond.

### Introduction to the Group

*Explain the process: creating a safe space, developing respect, trust and the freedom to share.*

### Reading the Text as Conversation (NRSV)

*Select five participants to read the voices of Jonadab, Amnon, David, Tamar and Absalom, and another to read the narrator's part, as indicated in the text.*

**[READER]:** David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister whose name was Tamar; and David's son Amnon fell in love with her. Amnon was so tormented that he made himself ill because of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin and it seemed impossible to Amnon to do anything to her. But Amnon had a friend whose name was Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimeah; and Jonadab was a very crafty man.

**(JONADAB-AMNON):** O son of the king, why are you so haggard morning after morning? Will you not tell me?

**(AMNON-JONADAB):** I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister.

**(JONADAB-AMNON):** Lie down on your bed, and pretend to be ill; and when your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat, and prepare the food in my sight, so that I may see it and eat it from her hand.'

**(AMNON-DAVID):** Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, so that I may eat from her hand.

**(DAVID-TAMAR):** Go to your brother Amnon's house, and prepare food for him.

**(AMNON-TAMAR):** Bring the food into the chamber, so that I may eat from your hand... Come, lie with me, my sister.

**(TAMAR-AMNON):** No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel. Now therefore, I beg you, speak to the king; for he will not withhold me from you.

**(AMNON-TAMAR):** Get out!

**(TAMAR-AMNON):** No, my brother; for this wrong – sending me away is greater than the other thing that you did to me.

**(AMNON-SERVANTS):** Put this woman out of my presence, and bolt the door after her.

**(ABSALOM-TAMAR):** Has Amnon your brother been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother; do not take this to heart.

**[READER]:** So Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom's house. When King David heard of all these things, he became very angry, but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn. But Absalom spoke to Amnon neither good nor bad; for Absalom hated Amnon, because he had raped his sister Tamar.

## Initial Analysis of Text

*Allow time to reflect on the questions below. Discuss these questions in small groups and then report back briefly to the large group. The facilitator will then provide explanatory and background material.*

1. What is the story about?
2. Who are the main characters in the story and what is important about each character?
3. What are the most important issues in the story?

## Summary of Text

This is a narrative about a rape that happens in the household of King David. **Amnon** is the first-born among King David's sons. He is the son of Ahinoam. Amnon's raping of his half-sister conveys the patriarchal culture that assumes men have the right to use women's bodies as they wish. Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar, loathes her, and finally throws her out to live the rest of her life ashamed and in silence.[59] In fact, Amnon is a true reflection of his father David's treatment of women in the wider patriarchal society (see his violation of Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11-12). Another character is **Jonadab**, the son of David's brother Shimeah. Jonadab is a shrewd and cunning person. He advises Amnon on how to deceive David, so that he (Amnon) can get time alone with Tamar. **Tamar** is the daughter of King David. In the story she is introduced as the sister of Absalom. She is the victim of rape, violence and the rough power games of Hebrew patriarchal culture.

**David** is also part of this narrative, but seems to be silent. His silence indicates his support of patriarchal norms and values. David's silence also opens the way for **Absalom** to pretend that he is vindicating justice for his sister Tamar. But in reality, Absalom's behaviour is motivated by a desire for power – over his brother Amnon and his father David. This story also conveys the message about women (regardless of context) often being used as scapegoats to maintain male power and superiority. Consequently, women tend to internalise violence and powerlessness as norms they have to endure,

59 Musa Muneja, "Cakes, Rape and Power Games: A Feminist Reading of the Story of Tamar (2 Samuel 13: 1-22), *BOLESWA Journal of Theology, Religion and Philosophy* 1, no. 2 (Dec. 2006): 83.

for the sake of maintaining the stability of family and society. In many societies including Samoa, gender-based violence (which is used interchangeably with phrases such as domestic violence and violence against women) is a clear manifestation of deeply entrenched power inequalities between men and women.

In Tamar's story we find a *rape* which combines elements of *incest* and violence against women. "In the Hebrew Bible ... the concept of rape, without excluding psychological or social or political or emotional domination, of necessity includes the use of physical force/violence in compelling a woman to non-consensual sexual intercourse."[60] What is remarkable here is the narrator's description of Amnon's physical overpowering of Tamar: "And being stronger than her, he *seized her* and lay with her"(13:14).[61] This description reveals both Amnon's use of physical force in overpowering Tamar despite Tamar's verbal attempts to resist Amnon's shameful sexual advances. Amnon succeeded because he was stronger than Tamar and did not listen to her voice.[62] The narrator's elaborate descriptions of Tamar's explicit reaction after the rape (vv. 14-16: "and she went away, crying aloud as she went") leave the reader without a doubt that a forced sexual encounter (rape) has taken place.[63]

Despite Tamar's expectation that Amnon would marry her (v. 16, cf. Ex 22:16; Deut 22:8), she was put away with contempt (vs. 15, 17-18) and immediately went into mourning. Tearing her long gown, which she was wearing as a virgin princess, was a sign of grief rather than lost virginity, as was putting ashes on her head and placing a hand on her head (cf. Jer 2:37). David, according to v. 21, was angry when he heard what had happened, "but he would not punish his son Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn." David's leniency probably incurred Absalom's resentment, but he restrained himself for the time being (v. 22).

There is a *conspiracy* of men aiding and assisting the perpetrator of the crime (Jonadab and, inadvertently, David) and a male conspiracy of silence after the act (Absalom and David). Finally, there is a raw form of *retribution* in the end (Absalom), but this brutal act of revenge is done quite apart from the victim. All power to act or even to speak is taken away from Tamar by both her brothers and her father. In 2 Samuel 13: 31, the father of all three of the principal characters in this drama, as well as all his servants, are seen to mourn, cry and weep "very bitterly" day after day, not for the victim, but for the rapist and the rapist's brother.[64] Patriarchal power structures make Tamar's rape possible, and also guide both her and her family's responses to it. As Esther Fuchs notes:

> It could be argued, however, that were it not for the patriarchal order compelling the unmarried daughter and sister to obey her father and brothers, Tamar may never have gone to Amnon's house in the first place. The real victimization of Tamar does not begin with her rape by Amnon but with David's ordering her to go to

60 Abasili, "Was it Rape? The David and Bathssheba Pericope Re-examined," 14.
61 Abasili, "Was it Rape? The David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-examined," 14.
62 S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*. JSOTSup (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 265.
63 M. Gray, "Amnon: A Chip Off the Old Block? Rhetorical Strategy in 2 Sm 13:7-15: The Rape of Tamar and the Humiliation of the Poor," *JSOT* 77 (1998): 43-44.
64 Fred Nyabera & Taryn Montgomery, *Contextual Bible Study Manual on Gender-Based Violence* (Nairobi: FECCLAHA, 2007), 26.

> Amnon's house and prepare food for her would-be sick brother. Her victimization does not end with Absalom's seemingly caring instructions for her to "be quiet." For if Amnon robs Tamar of her virginity, Absalom robs her of her own voice. In many indirect ways the protection of the sister by her "good" brother is just as harmful as her abuse by her "bad" brother.[65]

## Background to the Text

David's silence as a father is revealed in his failure to discipline his son Amnon. This type of silence is a form of cover-up, or a deliberate act of sweeping a crime under the rug, hoping that it will go away. In truth it is a denial of justice. Amnon's crime was a true reflection of David's own selfhood. It is important to note that the silence of David led to Absalom's silence and his attempt to silence Tamar. This was a form of silence that was released through physical retaliation and murder. This story also shows that the home that was supposed to provide love, protection and care for Tamar became a site of betrayal and violence. This story is therefore a reminder that violence against women in all contexts often happens within the home. Amnon, son of David and Ahinoam, fell in love with Tamar, full sister of Absalom, both children of David and Maacah.[66] His desire for Tamar was so intense that it made him ill, and he had to resort to a form of trickery proposed by his cousin Jonadab (v. 3-5). Apparently, virgins were under close guard, and Amnon did not have access to Tamar (v. 3), but a request to David, when he visited the crown-prince, brought Tamar to him and he raped her. He did not listen to her pleading, in which she indicated the serious consequences for both of them; marriage between brother and half-sister appears to have been possible at this time (cf. Gen 20:12), although later such marriages were prohibited by law (Lev 18:9; 20:17; Deut 27:22). Amnon was obviously driven by will to power, not love, and his action was followed by an intense loathing of Tamar.

## Theological Reflection on the Text

When violence happens, we often ask "where is God?" The same question is raised by the story of Tamar. The fact is that, although God is always present, God gives us free will, and we can make bad decisions that lead to the violation of women and other vulnerable people. These bad decisions are often made by people to assert their power and control over others, often women and girls. Amnon, Jonadab, David and Absalom were obsessed with power, and this guided their actions. The consequences of their actions blinded them from focusing on God. This same self-centredness and desire for power is also present in our communities today. In the face of such temptations, our challenge as Christians is to uphold our Christian values of love, compassion and justice for all, so that all may have life.

## A Contextual Reflection

Although this story reflects realities in ancient Israel, it is also a story that is not so alien from our own society today. It reveals the realities which some people in our own communities encounter. The Ministry of Women Community and Social Development (MWCSD) Study underlines that:

65 Esther Fuchs, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative: Reading the Hebrew Bible as a Woman*. (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 205.

66 Ibid.

> violence normally takes place at home when such roles and values are misunderstood and unappreciated. For instance, the husband may physically abuse his wife for disrespecting his mother. Generally, family members would endorse such an act and as a result it becomes a norm in the Samoan society. Such violent behaviour as stressed earlier is not linked to the Samoan culture. This is an illustration of power and control on behalf of the man to assert control over his wife.[67]

Reading the story of Tamar brings to the surface several realities that can be found in Samoan communities today. It is a story that articulates the darker realities in the communities and churches to which we belong. Tamar was a "princess" who had "wisdom, courage and (ultimately unrelieved suffering),"[68] yet her wisdom did not save her from being victimised and experiencing great shame. Likewise, Samoan women as victims of violence are also often made to feel ashamed and end up taking the blame for what happened to them.

The Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD) Study noted that incidents of violence against women have increased from 46% in 2000 to 60% in 2017. In Samoa, social attitudes tolerate the abuse of women in the home, and such abuse is common.[69] The MWCSD Study also affirms the following as contributing factors to women's violence: "disagreement over treatment of children (26%), husband not happy with wife's behaviour towards his family (eg. looks down on them) (18%); respondent disobeying her partner (14%) and partner not satisfied with the wife's performance within the family (12%)."[70] The MWCSD presented this case study to highlight some of these factors contributing to domestic violence in Samoa:

> Victim 2 is a 24 year old mother of two young daughters living with her husband's family. She got married in the same year she graduated from high school. Her husband is a 28 year old mechanic. People living together in the husband's family include his parents and four sisters who are also married with children. The husband goes to work and leaves the wife and children with his family. Emotional abuse by the mother-in-law and husband's sisters started to emerge. They ganged up against her, calling her names and that she was not a good wife. Physical fights between her and the family became frequent. The husband too joined in and frequently bashed her with his fists. The husband was more loyal to his parents and sisters than to her. She was aware of the main cause of all this: that her husband's family was disappointed that she knew about the incest case in the family. This involved the husband's father whose current wife is actually his step-daughter. As is so common, incest and violence coexist and the experience of Victim 2 highlights the fact that what breeds family violence is often a mishmash of complex family and individual histories. She had to leave to be free from this vicious cycle of family violence.[71]

67 MWCSD, (2017): 12.
68 Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-feminist Readings of Biblical Narrative* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 37.
69 Mataafa Keni Lesa, "Domestic Violence, a Coward and Speaking Up," *Samoa Observer*, February 18, 2014.
70 MWCSD, xviii.
71 Ministry of Women Community and Social Development, 2017 *Samoa Family Safety Study* (Apia: MWCSD, 2017), 98.

Considering the increasing incidences of violence against women (including incest), Samoan society is being called to acknowledge the reality before them and admit that domestic violence has become a normative aspect of everyday life in Samoa.[72] Sadly, the most respected and powerful agent of transformation, the church, is all too often not only silent about domestic violence, but also takes part in it. It either protects perpetrators or downplays and turns a blind eye to the domestic violence occurring in its midst.[73]

As in ancient Israel, Samoan society is based on patriarchal norms and understandings of authority and power relations in the family and wider society. These norms at times justify violence against women. Furthermore, a patriarchal theology continues to shape Samoans' interpretation of the Bible. A literal reading of biblical passages is still used to justify men's dominance over women and their physical "discipline" of women and children. The Bible is not only taken out of context but used to buttress the imbalance of power between men and women.[74] In the Samoan churches:

> traditional patriarchal interpretations of the Bible have been and remain unquestioned. The uncritical imposition of this approach to biblical hermeneutics ... is a contributing factor to the problem of violence against women... It is through the influence of this tradition that the inferior status of women has been reinforced.[75]

## Using The Story of Tamar to Raise Awareness Of Gender-Based Violence Against Women

*In the small groups, ask a volunteer to read the following quotation, perhaps more than once:*

> Tamar is someone whose story is still very modern. Tamar was sexually assaulted, not by a stranger, *but by someone she knew*. The violation took place not in a desolate remote place at the hands of a stranger, but *by a member of her own family* in his home. Tamar was exploited through one of her most vulnerable traits — her kindness, her *culturally instilled obedience* and her upbringing to take care of the other. Tamar said 'No' and *her 'No' was not respected*. When Tamar sought help *she was told to hush it up*. The process for achieving justice and restitution was *taken out of her hands entirely and carried forward by her brother*. No other women are even recorded in this story as having a voice or a role in coming to Tamar's aid. It became men's business; and in the end, it was Tamar's perpetrator for whom her father mourned, not for her. In fact, *the*

72 Mine Pase, "Gospel and Culture Samoan Style," in *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania*, ed. Lydia Johnson and Joan Filemoni-Tofeano (Suva, Fiji: Weavers/SPATS and Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2003), 72.
73 Filemoni-Tofaeono and Johnson discuss this reality in the context of various types of abuse occurring on the campus of an island theological school, all of which were minimised or ignored by those in authority. See Joan Filemoni-Tofeano and Lydia Johnson, *Reweaving the Relational Mat: A Christian Response to Violence Against Women from Oceania* (London: Equinox Press, 2006), Chapter 6, "The Praxis of Violence Against Women in the Oceanian Theological School Setting," 124-138.
74 Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, "Public Theology, Core Values, and Domestic Violence in Samoan Society" (Phd thesis: University of Otago, Dunedin, 2015), 292-3.
75 Filemoni-Tofaeono and Johnson, *Reweaving the Relational Mat*, 96.

*end of Tamar's story happens without her.*[76]

*Discuss the questions below that arise from the quote:*

1. How common is it for women in our communities to experience violence from men they know?
2. Like Tamar, Samoan women are also imbued with a culture of obedience; how would this make them vulnerable to being exploited by men?
3. Tamar was not allowed to resist, was silenced, and that any revenge was placed in the hands of her brother. How might this relate to the sister-brother covenant in Samoa as explained in the quote below?
4. Do brothers seek to protect their sisters from gender violence?
5. Would they, like Absalom, take it upon themselves to seek vengeance (or justice) on behalf of their sisters?
6. Is this something to be encouraged, or does it only serve to silence sisters, rather than giving them agency to seek their own justice?

*Ask the reporter for each small group to share the group's responses for the whole group. The facilitator should then summarise all responses from the small groups on a whiteboard or newsprint.*

## Questions for Further Reflection

*[If there is time, the whole group can reflect on these questions. If not, participants can be encouraged to reflect on their own after they have left the session.]*

1. Are there examples you have observed in your community that remind you of the story of Tamar?
2. What are the most common forms of violence against women in your community?
3. What are the contributing factors to women being violated in your community?
4. What forms of transformation are needed in your church to better address the problem of violence against women?
5. (5) What do you think the expression "the end of Tamar's story happens without her" means, and how does it relate to stories of violence against women in your community?

## From Awareness to Action

From the awareness they have gained through this discussion group, participants are invited to identify concrete actions they may take to address gender based violence against women within their churches, families and local communities. They may move toward reviving the importance of values of respect, love and justice to assist women who are victims of domestic violence, and also to help men and others who are perpetrators of violence. Pastors are also encouraged to offer a series of Bible studies for parishioners in their community, and to continually preach and dialogue on the urgent need to transform human relationships for the wellbeing of all people.

76 Nyabera & Montgomery, *Contextual Bible Study Manual*, 26.

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NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE FOR PACIFIC RESEARCH

# Section 2
# Background Briefing

# Violence Against Women in Samoa

***Ramona Boodoosingh, Melanie Beres, and David Tombs***

## Summary

This research briefing provides information about the context of violence against women (VAW) in Samoa. It explores the social, cultural, and religious systems that serve to sustain the nation's high rates of VAW, including local governance structures and the gender roles inherent within them. There is particular focus on the role of the Christian church in Samoa, and the authors note that, while it can be complicit in perpetuating gender inequalities which sustain VAW, it also has undeniable potential as a source of positive change.

### Introduction

The purpose of this research briefing is to provide information about the context of violence against women (VAW) in Samoa, including the role of Samoan churches in both perpetuating *and* tackling VAW. The problem of VAW is not unique to Samoa. Yet its manifestations, and the potential for change, are shaped by social systems, the two most influential of which are local governance hierarchies and the church. Together these systems reinforce conservative gender values, and are deeply influential in shaping local responses to VAW. Almost the whole population of Samoa is affiliated with the Christian faith and participation in church activities is an integral part of Samoan life. Pastors are highly regarded in their communities, with teachings from the pulpit influencing the thinking of local governance mechanisms. As has been documented in local family safety studies, the church can therefore play a significant role in responding to VAW in Samoa.

This research report will provide a broad overview of the landscape of Samoa's responses to VAW, including statistical data, the services available for survivors of VAW, and the traditional and state governance structures that deal with incidents of VAW. The report recognises VAW as a form of gender-based violence (violence perpetrated against a person on account of their gender), and considers different types of gender-based violence, including physical, sexual, and emotional violence. While not excluding discussion of VAW directed against girls, this research briefing primarily focuses on the experiences of adult women.

### Samoa: An Overview

Samoa is an independent Polynesian nation located in the South Pacific, midway between Hawaii and New Zealand. It is comprised of two larger islands, Upolu and Savaii, where the majority of the population reside, with several smaller islands, Namua, Apolima, and Manono, being occupied by a few families and villages. There are also several small unoccupied islands. The main drivers of the Samoan economy are remittances, tourism, foreign aid, and agriculture and it is classified as a lower-middle economy by the United Nations (Fantom & Serajuddin, 2016).

Occupied for approximately three thousand years, the population remains almost entirely Samoan and was estimated to be 187,820 at the last population census conducted in 2011 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics [SBS],

2012a). Approximately 80% of the population reside in rural areas (SBS, 2012a). Samoa's population is almost equitably distributed by sex and is relatively young; only 5% of the population are above 65 years old and an approximate 40% are younger than 15 (SBS, 2012a). Since gaining independence in 1962, Samoa utilises a unicameral parliamentary system based on Westminster principles. As of 1990, all citizens aged 21 years and older are eligible to vote in elections, which are held every five years.

In Samoa, the traditional governance structure of the village fono (council) is inextricably linked to the composition of the parliament, as a person must be recognised as a matai (chief) by their village to be able to run for election for one the 50 parliamentary seats. Between 1962 (when Samoa gained independence from New Zealand) and 2013, no more than four women have been members of parliament at the same time, and most sat for one term only. This is likely due to the fact that few women living in villages hold matai (chiefly) titles, so their ability to run for parliamentary election are seriously restricted. To meet Millennium Development Goal 3 (to promote gender equality and empower women) and in accordance with the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Article 4 (which provides for temporary measures if they facilitate equality), the Constitution Amendment Act was passed in 2013; this Act introduced a 10% quota of women representatives into the national Legislative Assembly, thereby ensuring that a minimum of five parliamentary seats will always be filled by women. If fewer than five seats are won by women, the non-elected women candidates with the highest number of votes will be appointed to make up the five seats. This happened for the first time after the March 2016 election, when a fifth woman was added to the four elected women under the special measures provision.

The gender disparity in parliament is also apparent in economic participation. While 72.6% of men are economically active, only a minority (27.4%) of women participate in the workforce (World Health Organisation, 2014). However, women are more likely than men to complete their higher education (SBS, 2012a). As such, the jobs that women tend to hold include managerial positions, associate professions, and technical occupations. A number of women are thus in the difficult position of being better educated than men and occupying important positions within the workplace but still having relatively little access to power in governance.

In terms of its religious landscape, almost the entire population of Samoa is Christian, with the largest denominations being the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (known as the EFKS),[2] the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. A small percentage of the population belong to other churches such as the Anglican Church, Assemblies of God, the Seventh-day Adventists, and a number of independent evangelical churches. The only non-Christian faiths with congregations that meet regularly are Baha'i and Islam.

Most Samoan villages have maintained the traditional governance system of the village fono, as well as a number of other traditional roles associated with different village groups. These traditional roles, and the expectations surrounding them, have been intermingled with Christian ideologies and teachings that

were adopted from missionaries in the nineteenth century, making it difficult if not impossible to separate traditional Samoan principles of governance from associated Christian principles.

## Violence Against Women in Samoa: Intersections With Local Governance

Despite the progress made by women in terms of academic and professional achievements, they continue to experience limited opportunities to hold positions of authority in three of Samoa's key decision-making institutions: the village fono (council), the parliament, and the church. This section will focus on the fono, illustrating that the limited presence of women in key decision making roles within local governance systems has a perceptible impact on women's ability to access justice if they have experienced gender-based violence.

Samoa became a party to CEDAW in 1992. This Convention, while not defining violence against women or girls explicitly, contains two general recommendations which pertain to such violence (UN Women, n.d.). Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally obliged to put its provisions into practice, and must submit national reports at least every four years, detailing the steps they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations. In their responses to Samoa's fourth and fifth CEDAW reports, the UN Committee to End Discrimination Against Women (2012) identified several challenges, such as disaggregated data, rural women's limited knowledge about their rights under the convention, the perpetuation of social and cultural norms which sanction violence against women and girls, and women's limited access to matai titles (affecting their participation in decision-making in the village, as well as their potential presence in government). An independent UN Human Rights group which was recently invited to Samoa noted that while there has been progress in the acceptability of discussions about gender based violence, initiatives to combat this national problem remain scattered and under-resourced, while women still face challenges in accessing decision-making roles at village and state governance levels ('What UN Human Rights mission found about Samoa', 2017). However, as will be discussed in more detail below, some progress has been made, including the introduction of the 'no drop' policy (that requires police to investigate all reports of domestic violence) and the creation of both a Domestic Violence Unit in the Police Service and a Family Violence Court. These changes signify the growing importance placed on addressing domestic and family violence in Samoa.

### *The Village Governance System*

In order to understand the context in which VAW occurs in Samoa, it is important to consider the structures and cultural ideologies inherent to Samoa's traditional governance system. There are 275 local government areas of which 240 are traditional villages (Meleisea et al., 2015). Almost 80% of the population reside in rural areas and the majority are governed under traditional village fono. Fono are comprised of the matai (chiefs) within the village; These matai represent their families in the fono meeting (which occur monthly or more often if necessary).[3] Fono set and enforce bylaws governing the conduct of people living in the village; they also make decisions related to economic development and government services.

To facilitate communication between the village and the Samoan government, most villages also have two government representatives, the village representative and the women's representative. The village representative, known as the sui o le nu'u (previously called the pulenu'u, or village mayor) is a matai from the village and is paid by the government for performing this role. Newer non-traditional suburbs and settlements do not have a village fono, but many have village representatives who are chosen by the congregations of local churches (Meleisea et al., 2015). Women's representatives (sui o tama'ita'i o nu'u) are chosen by the village Women's Committee (known as the komiti; see below for further details), and are often older, educated women who are married to matai. Their responsibilities include recording births and deaths in the village, liaising between the komiti and the government, and providing a point of contact for government agencies wishing to communicate with village-based women. Women's representatives report to the Women's Division in the Ministry of Women, Community, and Social Development (MWCSD) and are responsible for organising the Ministry's village-level programmes for women (Meleisea et al., 2015).

In addition to fono, Samoan villages have two further traditional structures: the aumaga (untitled men who provide much of the manual labour for the village, such as farming and fishing) and the aualuma (daughters of the village). The title of aualuma serves as a birthright, so that women who leave their birth village when they marry still retain their rank as a daughter of the village if they later return. Historically, it was not acceptable for a woman and man to marry within the same village, although this practice has become increasingly tolerated over time. Women enjoy a higher social rank in the village and family of their birth than if they move to their husband's village after marriage. In other words, a woman's rank is considered higher as a sister than as a wife; a wife is understood to take her status from her husband and is not expected to have a higher status than his. When a woman is married and moves to her husband's village, she is called a nofotane (daughter-in-law) and is expected to live in service to her husband's family. The nofotane's vulnerability to violence was highlighted by the Samoa Victim Support Group in their submission to the 2015 State of Human Rights Report, where they noted that nofotane make up much of their caseload (Office of the Ombudsman and National Human Rights Institute [OONHRI], 2015). Married women do retain their status as sisters in their own families, and when they are older may play a leading role in their family's decision making. As wives, however, they are subordinate to their in-laws, including their husband's mother, sisters, and other female relatives.

Samoan villages also incorporate two non-traditional governance structures: the Women's Committee (komiti) and the church. Women's Committees were created in the 1930s by the colonial government to ensure that there were good standards of hygiene and sanitation in the village, to support family welfare, and to conduct household inspections to check that families were able to maintain an acceptable standard of living. The Women's Division at the MWCSD serves as the Government unit in charge of managing the komiti. The komiti

is comprised of three status groups: the aualuma, the wives of the village matai, and the wives of the aumaga.

Despite a history which includes the presence of colonial powers and the influence of on-going globalisation, Samoa's traditional structures have endured. Families are close knit, with extended families including cousins, aunts, and uncles sharing the same household. Support for family members is illustrated through informal, customary adoptions where a child may go to live with another relative to reduce the financial burden on the biological parent or to allow them access to a better education. This closeness remains even when family members migrate overseas for employment or educational opportunities and send remittances to support family obligations. Fa'alavelave, or family obligations, require contributions from family members on occasions such as weddings and funerals, and pressures around these obligations have been identified as a potential contributing factor in VAW (see below).

The degree of protection available to women who have experienced violence can differ according to the location of their village. Cribb and Barnett (1999) found that women who lived in a traditional household in Papa village (on the Samoan island of Savai'i) were more confident about being able to return to their own families should they wish to do so. In Vaivase Tai, a more urban area of Samoa's capital Apia, families were more reliant on cash incomes instead of shared, communal subsistence agriculture or fishing. When they were unable to contribute to the household economy, women had to negotiate with their partners and the family matai for money, and were thus restricted by extra layers of social control. Similarly, Samoan women living in Hawaii felt that, in Samoa, they were afforded some protection when they lived in open houses (fales), where others could easily intervene if they were threatened with family violence. Such protection was diminished in Hawaii, however, where the women lived in enclosed, single family dwellings. Findings such as these suggest that the urbanisation process has led to a weakening of the extended family and social support mechanisms, which in turn reduces the opportunities for women to escape family violence (Cribb & Barnett, 1999; Magnussen, Shoultz, Hansen, Sapolu, & Samifua, 2008). Compared to the past, when people lived in nucleated villages of open-walled houses, many houses are now closed structures, and located further apart from one another, with the result that violence against women is more easily hidden within the family (SBS, 2012a).

### *The Village Fono*

Prior to the introduction of the village representative, matters could only be brought to the village fono by the family's matai. Now, however, the village representative can also bring matters to the attention of the fono. The village fono has the power to decide penalties for a number of transgressions, including instances of VAW, as well as more minor misdemeanours. Penalties can include fines of money, goods, or animals payable by the offender or their family. The collection and distribution of fines are likewise at the discretion of fono members. In some cases, the offender may be banished from the village, sometimes along with their family. Shared understandings of what does and does not constitute acceptable conduct differ from village to village and are often unwritten, as are the decisions made about the penalties imposed for behaviour that is considered

unacceptable. Few villages have written bylaws, and instead, community knowledge about offences and penalties (such as stealing, disruptive behaviour, assault, and breaking curfew) is shared verbally and through the fono's decision making practices. In the case of severe offences, such as rape, serious injury, or insult, the offender's family may also perform a traditional ifoga (apology) ceremony to mend the relationship between themselves and the family of the victim of the offence.

## Gender Disparities in the Fono

Despite programmes which have encouraged women to run for parliament, a study by Meleisea et al. (2015) found that the lack of women in parliament mirrors a low representation of women in the village fono; moreover, women face impediments to holding these decision-making roles. According to the 2011 census (SBS, 2012a), 9% of the population aged fifteen and older were holders of matai titles; of this number, only 11% were women. At the time of this study, only 6% of matai in traditional villages were women (Meleisea et al., 2015). Moreover, approximately 26% (9) of non-traditional villages (including new settlements, large residential compounds, and suburban areas) and 78% (188) of traditional villages recognised female title holders who resided in the village. This closely mirrors the statistics around female matai participation in village fono meetings. Only four non-traditional villages were found to have female village representatives participating in the fono.

There is no law prohibiting a woman from being bestowed a matai title; however, a number of reasons are often used to justify why women ought not to hold matai titles or sit in the fono, including issues pertaining to their rank, the coarse language used by men during the fono, and appeals to certain biblical passages that are read as injunctions against women's participation in local governance (Percival, 2013; Meleisea et al., 2015). Even when women do have a recognised matai title, they may choose not to attend fono meetings, as their attendance would go against accepted local custom (Meleisea et al., 2015). And, while Article 15 of the Constitution of Samoa forbids discrimination on the grounds of sex, Article 100 provides that a matai title shall be held in accordance with 'Samoan custom and usage' (Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa, 1960). This provision is not defined further in the Constitution or any legal act, yet Samoan 'custom' may include the exclusion of female matai from governance roles. Indeed, the 2015 State of Human Rights Report noted that many girls and women interviewed for the report believed that 'men are the only ones fit to make decisions at both the village and central government levels' (OONHRI, 2015, p. 23).

## The Fono and Violence Against Women

While the village fono clearly plays a significant role in handling disputes *between* families, it rarely passes judgement on offenses committed *within* families. As a result, matters involving family violence are not always brought to the fono, especially because 'the belief is still widely held that family differences, such as domestic violence, should be settled within the family. These are not a matter for public discussion given the "shame" this could bring' (Fairbairn-Dunlop & Lievore, 2007, p. ii). If a case is brought, the fono can provide immediate access to justice, although there is variability in penalties between fono and the outcomes of these cases are not

documented. On some occasions, the village fono may also prohibit the victim of VAW from reporting the matter to the police, making it impossible for them to seek justice through more official state channels.

Additionally, decisions made by the fono about episodes of VAW are not always in accordance with human rights principles, as illustrated by a case reported in the local media in 2013. A thirteen-year-old girl had been sexually abused by at least two young men in the village of Eva. According to custom, the girl was not allowed to address the fono, but the men involved were given the opportunity to speak. After deliberating, the fono decided to banish the young girl from her village, to 'protect the young men of the village from becoming involved in this kind of behaviour again' (Ale, 2013). The offenders were, however, subsequently arrested by the police and charged with sexual assault. Although the fono appeared to attribute to the victim some culpability for her own assault, the state legal system placed the responsibility firmly at the feet of the offenders.

Although the village fono rarely passes judgment on offenses committed within families, the Samoa Family Safety Study reported that 84% of male respondents and 76% of female respondents identified the fono as their preferred institution for dealing with family violence (MWCSD, 2017). The study also emphasised the indivisible connection between the village fono and the church, and therefore recommended that the MWCSD

> encourage village councils to introduce curfew for evening devotion, to encourage village councils to urge village church ministers to conduct regular visits with families who live on the edges of the village, to deliberate with the village councils to introduce stiffer penalties for family violence offences, to encourage village councils to reintroduce Sunday bans in order for all family members to attend church services on Sundays and to convince village councils and church ministers through advocacy work and through female and male government representatives to promote family safety issues in respective family meetings (MWCSD, 2017, p. 114).

It is clear from the discussion above that the village fono plays a pivotal governance role in traditional villages; discussions about VAW within the male-dominated fono can therefore influence decision-making and planning around this issue. Some matai are also perpetrators of domestic violence, as evidenced by the data gathered for the 2000 Samoa Family Health and Safety Study, where 35% of male respondents who admitted to perpetrating acts of physical domestic abuse held matai titles (Secretariat of the Pacific Community [SPC], 2006). The opinions of several male matai on domestic violence were recorded in a two-part documentary film, *Sisi le la'afa – raise the sennit sail* (2015), directed by film maker Galumalemana Steven Percival. One of the matai interviewed by Percival in the documentary defined acts of domestic violence as 'heavy instruction' (Percival, 2015). Another matai from the village of Sala'ilua explained to Percival that domestic violence occurs when other, less abusive, forms of discipline have failed: 'If a man's hand should reach a woman this means education has become heavy, because no avail have been the light and tender words and a gentle approach – it has not worked' (Percival, 2015). And a matai from the

village of Satapuala ma Vailu'utai appeared to suggest that only the most severe forms of physical assault perpetrated against a wife would constitute an act of domestic violence, 'such as being beaten by a man with a basket carrying pole or thrashed with a brush knife blade when he reaches a point of great anger in his heart. That I believe is violence' (Percival, 2015). This implies that less serious forms of violence may not even be recognised as abusive.

Intersecting with these structural roadblocks to tackling violence against women is the fact that many Samoan women and men believe to varying degrees that domestic violence is acceptable under certain circumstances. Focus groups and survey data collected for the 2015 State of Human Rights Report showed that 'many participants felt that Fa'asamoa and human rights particularly conflicted in this area, with many citing that Fa'asamoa permits husbands to beat their wives' (OONHRI, 2015, p. 26). This is also echoed by some of the women who appear in Percival's documentary (2015). In the second part of the documentary, community members from several Samoan villages respond to a viewing of the first part, which had introduced some of the issues and attitudes towards VAW in Samoan culture. A number of women who appear in this part of the film expressed their belief that women are supposed to satisfy their husbands and 'cleanse the bowl' – bowl being a colloquial reference to the vagina (Percival, 2015). Others suggested that wives may be to blame for the abuse they receive at the hands of their husband, if, for example, they are not submissive enough towards their husbands or do not adequately study the Bible's teachings (see Schoeffel, Boodoosingh, & Percival, 2018). Some of the women also suggested that incest and sexual assault occur because wives neglect their duty to protect their daughters and fail to satisfy the sexual desires of their husbands (Schoeffel et al., 2018).

## Statistics and Studies of Violence Against Women in Samoa

The majority of data on reported incidents of VAW in Samoa is provided by different police units and the courts. The need to improve the gathering and analysis of data on VAW was noted in 2012 by the UN Committee to End Discrimination against Women. The National Human Rights Institution (NRHI) was created in 2013, within the Office of the Ombudsman, and issued its first State of Human Rights Report in 2015.[4] This report noted the unsatisfactory quality of the available data on VAW, including its limited disaggregation by sex, age group, and the relationship of the victim to the offender (OONHRI, 2015). The OONHRI report was preceded by the SBS's *Strategy for the development of statistics 2011-2021*, which included a recommendation to measure violence against women and girls more effectively (SBS, 2012b). The delivery date of this recommendation was supposed to be 2014, yet a review of the SBS website does not show any statistics of this nature being available. Underhill, Tung, Marsters, and Pene (2016) recently highlighted the need to strengthen the capacity for gender-responsive and evidence-based research in Pacific Island countries, including research into VAW.

There have been four major studies into the prevalence of VAW in Samoa; these were carried out in 1995, 2000-02, 2017, and 2017-18. The length of time between these studies makes it challenging to identify trends in reporting violence or the potential

impact of the introduction of new services. The 1995 study was led by a local non-governmental organisation (NGO), Mapusaga O 'Aiga (Family Haven), which was founded to raise public awareness about sexual abuse and violence against women and children. With funding from the Samoan government, this study involved interviews with 257 women aged 15 years and older from key parts of Samoa. Just over 50% percent of women in the sample expressed knowledge of violence against women occurring in their villages and 25% of participants disclosed that they had been victims of violence (cited in SPC, 2006).

This initial study was followed five years later by the first Samoa Family Health and Safety Study (SFHSS), which was a collaborative research endeavour involving SPC and the United Nations Population Fund. The data for the study was initially collected between 2000 and 2002, although the final report was not published until 2006. The measures used in this study had previously been developed for a multi-country research project by the World Health Organisation, and included the creation of separate surveys for male and female participants. Overall, 646 women and 664 men completed the surveys (SPC, 2006). The results indicated that 46.4% of women aged 15 to 49 years old had experienced intimate partner violence (physical, sexual, or emotional) by a present or past partner.

A second SFHSS was conducted in 2017, commissioned by MWCSD. This study sought to assess the present rates of gender-based violence in Samoa, and the impact of current interventions. There were variations in the methodology of the 2017 study compared to that of the first; the age range of the women participants in the 2017 study was narrowed to 20-49 years, and the focus was placed on women, children, the elderly, and disabled populations. There were also additional variations in the options presented for questions and the presentation of the final results. This study estimated that 60% of the women in the sample had experienced spousal abuse over their lifetime (MWCSD, 2017). It also identified different cultural factors that can lead to family violence, including the belief that the husband is the head of the family, the lack of knowledge about women's cultural status, and differences of opinion on how to discipline children (MWCSD, 2017, p. 95).

These studies also suggest that Samoan women who experience violence at the hands of their husbands rarely report it to the police. Almost three quarters of physically abused women in the 2006 SFHSS sample did not seek any form of help, as they considered spousal abuse as normal and 'not serious' (SPC, 2006, p. 43). Only 1.2% of physically abused women in the sample reported their abuse to the police (SPC, 2006). Based on the data provided by the Domestic Violence Unit of the Ministry of Prisons and Police (DVU), it is clear that there is still a high level of underreporting; approximately 2% of women reported their abuse to the DVU in 2011 (Boodoosingh, 2015).

Other studies have provided key insight into the perceptions of Samoan men and women about spousal abuse. Two Samoa Demographic Health Surveys were carried out in 2009 and 2014, with the results being published in 2010 and 2015 respectively. Both were nationally representative surveys involving a sample of women (aged 15-49 years) and men (aged 15-54 years). The 2009 study was implemented by the Samoa Ministry of Health in collaboration with SBS and with technical assistance from ICF Macro. Information was gathered on fertility,

marriage, sexual activity, reproductive health preferences, awareness and use of family planning methods, breastfeeding practices, nutritional status of women and young children, childhood mortality, maternal and child health, and awareness and behaviour regarding HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (Ministry of Health, SBS, & ICF Macro, 2010). The survey included a section on women's empowerment and health, and contained questions about attitudes towards wife beating, a wife's capacity for decision making, her right to refuse sex with her husband, and her agency with regard to contraceptive usage and family planning (Ministry of Health et al., 2010). These questions (also included in the 2014 survey) asked participants to consider if specific domestic events offered adequate justification for a husband to beat his wife, including when a wife burns the food she is cooking, argues with her husband, goes out without telling him, refuses to have sexual intercourse with him, or neglects their children.

In the 2009 survey (Ministry of Health et al., 2010), 61% of female participants affirmed that a husband was justified in beating his wife for at least one of the reasons provided. The participants more likely to give this response tended to share certain demographic characteristics pertaining to their age (early thirties), location (living in a rural area), socio-economic status (in the lower wealth quintiles or unemployed), educational status (having a lower level of education), and family status (having five or more children). Fewer male participants in the survey (46%) responded that one or more of the domestic events listed offered justification for a husband to beat his wife. Those who did were more likely to be younger, living in rural areas, unemployed, unmarried, and childless. In the 2014 Samoa Demographic Health Survey, these figures for both male and female participants were significantly lower, with 37% of women and 30% of men agreeing that at least one of the domestic scenarios presented could justify a husband's use of physical violence against his wife (SBS & Ministry of Health, 2015).

The most recent and fullest study into VAW in Samoa is the National Public Inquiry into Family Violence in Samoa Report carried out by OONHRI (2018). The report includes several key recommendations related to the village fono and the church. The Commission of Inquiry was Samoa's first national public inquiry and was carried out under section 41 of the Ombudsman Act 2013. The Inquiry was launched and chaired by Ombudsman Maiava Iulai Toma on 8 December 2016, assisted by commissioners from the National University of Samoa and New Zealand. The inquiry involved a lengthy consultation process with public hearings intended to promote a national public conversation. An initial report was made to parliament in November 2017, and the final report was completed in June 2018. The recommendations include:

- the 'development of a National Prevention Strategy founded on the principles of Fa'asamoa, human rights and faith';
- 'the development of a public theology on family violence which addresses Biblical misinterpretations that reinforce gender inequality and violence';
- 'Taking necessary measures to remove barriers affecting the participation of women and other groups in the Village Fono, Parliament and Churches';
- 'the amendment of the Village Fono Act 1990 to specifically list Family Violence

as an area of concern for the Village Fono';

- 'empowering the Village Fono and Village Safety Committee to play a role in bringing perpetrators of family violence to formal justice'; and
- 'Increasing the capacity of the church to protect against family violence and prevent placing victims at risk of further harm' (OONHRI, 2018, pp. 6-25).

These National Public Inquiry recommendations acknowledge the significant role of religion in Samoa, and recognise the vital part that the Christian church can play (alongside governmental and village governance structures) in tackling and preventing violence against women.

## Support Services in Samoa for People Impacted by Gender-Based Violence

In 2013, UN Special Rapporteur Rashida Manjoo stated that the responsibilities of states towards victims of VAW should include 'due diligence for the obligation of protection, by providing a woman with services such as telephone hotlines, health care, counselling centres, legal assistance, shelters, restraining orders and financial aid' (Manjoo, 2013, p. 19). Research conducted by Boodoosingh in 2014-15 examined the services available for Samoan victims and perpetrators of VAW from both state and non-state actors in the legal, education, health, and religious sectors (Boodoosingh, 2016). This study included a desk-based review of annual and strategic reports from various agencies and detailed interviews with local NGOs, including advocacy groups, support groups, crisis centres, relief agencies, and health organisations. In the absence of a registry of active NGOs and the services they offer, Boodoosingh sought out and identified the NGOs which could potentially provide support for both victims and perpetrators of VAW. The most prominent NGO operating in this area is the Samoa Victim Support Group. Their services include victim counselling, anger management for perpetrators, and helping victims apply for protection orders. The group also offers temporary shelter to abused women and separate longer term shelter for children of abused women (there are no shelters where abused women can stay with their children). Additionally, they provide care for girls who become pregnant from rape and incest, including nursery facilities for their babies.

Boodoosingh (2016) noted that other NGOs in Samoa provide services that can also be of value to victims and perpetrators of VAW. These include Nuanua O Le Alofa Inc., an organisation that provides training and support in life skills and employment for differently abled adults, and the Samoa Family Health Association, which is the local International Planned Parenthood affiliate and provides services focusing on sexual and reproductive health. Other organisations also contribute to the country's efforts to tackle VAW, including the Adventist Development Relief Agency, which runs public awareness campaigns about VAW to stimulate dialogue on the issue. Boodoosingh's (2016) study found that the most commonly available service for people affected by gender-based violence was counselling, although Samoa currently does not have a recognised standard for counselling services, nor a registration system for local counsellors. The Social Services Unit at the National Hospital in Apia provides counselling support and is staffed by certified social workers, but the

unit is understaffed and carries the heavy burden of providing support across the entire country. State ministries therefore rely strongly on the services provided by NGOs, who themselves experience chronic challenges in securing core funding, maintaining staffing through volunteers, and coping with limited managerial knowledge and experience (Boodoosingh, 2016).

Boodoosingh's research (2016) also highlights that the National Health Service does not have a clear police referral system in place when abused women present with injuries to the National Hospital. Moreover, cultural perceptions around domestic abuse may influence the responses of health workers to women presenting at the hospital with injuries commonly seen in domestic violence cases. For example, in a submission from the Nurses' Association to the Samoan Law Commission during a consultation on the proposed Crimes Act 2013 (see below for further details), the Association did not support the criminalisation of marital rape proposed in the Act (Samoa Law Reform Commission [SLRC], 2010; Boodoosingh, 2016).

## The Laws, the Police and the Courts: Intersections with Traditional Governance Structures

The Samoan Government has passed two pieces of legislation which pertain directly to VAW: the Crimes Act 2013, which repealed the Crimes Ordinance of 1961, and the Family Safety Act 2013.

### *The Crimes Act 2013*

The Crimes Act 2013 introduced the criminalisation of marital rape, which was previously unrecognised under the Crimes Ordinance 1961. The SLRC and other stakeholders also recommended an expansion of the definition of rape to include 'all forms of sexual penetration including the introduction into a male or female's genitalia of another part of a person's body or an object held or manipulated by another person' (SLRC, 2010, p. 11). Despite these submissions, rape remains narrowly defined in the Act as non-consensual (hetero)sexual intercourse, that is, penetration of the vagina by the penis, and carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment (Crimes Act 2013, ss 49, 52). It therefore separates rape from other forms of non-consensual sexual conduct, which are classified as 'unlawful sexual connection', and which carry a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment (Crimes Act 2013, ss 50, 52). The sentence for attempted rape was increased under the Act from 10 to 14 years (Crimes Act 2013, s 53).[5]

The Act also stipulates regulations for other forms of sexual violation, including incest and unlawful sexual connection with a minor. Sexual conduct with a male or female child of 12 years or younger carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment (Crimes Act 2013, s 58), while sexual conduct (and attempted sexual conduct) with a young person aged between 12 and 16 can incur a maximum 10-year sentence (Crimes Act 2013, s 59). A person found guilty of sexual conduct, attempted sexual conduct, or indecent assault against a dependent family member who is under the age of 21 can face a maximum 14-year prison sentence (Crimes Act 2013, ss 56-57). The Act also has a specific section of laws around incest, which is defined as sexual connection 'between 2 persons whose relationship is that of parent and child, siblings, half-siblings, or grandparent and grandchild' (Crimes Act 2013, s 55.1.a); 'child' and

'grandchild' include illegitimate and (formally or informally) adopted children. The penalty for incest, when perpetrated by a person over the age of 16, is increased under the Act to 20 years (compared to seven years in the Crimes Ordinance 1961; see Crimes Act 2013, s 55).

With regard to sexual harassment in the workplace, the Crimes Act 2013 does not address this specifically. Nevertheless, following an inquiry into complaints of sexual harassment in the Samoan Fire Service, the Ombudsman recognised that the common law of Samoa offers 'protection of sorts against sexual harassment' and that, 'by way of an employment contract, the employer has a duty to provide a safe system of work, safe equipment and competent co-workers' (Moore, 2013).

Lastly, under the Act, the provision of abortion and attempts to access this service remain tightly restricted. Medical abortion is permitted in exceptional circumstances where, in the view of a registered medical practitioner, the life or physical and/or mental health of the mother will be seriously endangered by continuing the pregnancy (Crimes Act 2013, s 116). In other circumstances, including cases of rape and incest, the woman is required to carry the foetus to term.

### *The Family Safety Act 2013*

The Family Safety Act 2013 introduced a number of new policies and procedures to better deal with domestic violence, application for protection orders, and police responses to complaints about domestic violence. Domestic violence is defined in the Act as a form of violence that occurs between people in a 'domestic relationship', be it through marriage (legal, customary, or de facto), romantic relationships, familial relationships, adoption (legal or customary), or shared residency (Family Safety Act 2013, s 2). Domestic violence encompasses physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse, including intimidation, harassment, stalking, and any other 'controlling or abusive behaviour which has or may cause harm to the safety, health or wellbeing of the complainant' (Family Safety Act 2013, s 2).

The Family Safety Act 2013 also introduced what has been called the 'no drop' policy, which stipulates that police officers respond to all reports of domestic violence they receive (Family Safety Act 2013, s 16); furthermore, they must ensure that the complainants are made aware of their rights to lodge a criminal complaint, and are assisted to find suitable shelter, medical treatment, and counselling support (Family Safety Act 2013, s 15). When the reported incident involves sexual or physical assault, police officers are instructed to do everything necessary to ensure that the case is prosecuted in court (Family Safety Act 2013, s 16). This no drop policy was recommended by Kingi and Roguski (2011) in their baseline report for the Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme (PPDVP).[6] It attempted to counter the continuous reliance of traditional reconciliation techniques in cases related to domestic violence.

As well as their no drop policy relating to incidents of domestic violence that involve physical or sexual assault, the Family Safety Act 2013 also affords a measure of discretion in how police deal with cases of emotional or psychological violence. Under s 16 ('Duty to Prosecute'), a police officer may refer the matter to an authorised counselling service or can choose to pursue charges in cases of repeated offending. The

Act does not, however, offer protection to those who report an occurrence of domestic violence that they have witnessed. This has repercussions for levels of reporting domestic violence. According to the 2015 State of Human Rights Report, only 25% of adults who witness abuse report it to the police, often because they fear that their report will not remain confidential, and that they will not be offered a protection order to safeguard them from retaliation (OONHRI, 2015).

### Police Services and Courts in Samoa

The Police and Prisons Units operate under the governance of the Ministry of Police and Prisons while the Courts operate under the Ministry of Justice and Court Administration. There are two main police stations in Samoa, one in Upolu and the other in Savaii, and each station has a number of outposts – six on Upolu and three on Savaii. A specialised Domestic Violence Unit (DVU) was created in 2007, and its responsibilities include handling incidents of domestic violence and applications for protection orders. The DVU deals with matters which carry maximum penalties of less than five years; all matters relating to sexual violence, or other incidents of domestic violence that carry maximum sentences of five years or more, are referred to the Criminal Investigation Division and are tried in the Supreme Court. The General Policing Division of the Police Service also handles matters which carry maximum penalties of less than five years imprisonment and also provide police help in domestic violence cases. When discussing domestic violence in Samoa, the media often rely on statistics from the DVU. This leads to an underestimation of the prevalence and extent of domestic violence in Samoa, as these statistics do not include more serious cases dealt with by the Criminal Investigation Division, or the many other domestic disputes handled by the General Policing Division, which may not involve an offence being committed or result in charges being laid (Boodoosingh, 2016).

Kingi and Roguski's 2011 report to the PPDVP documents that Samoan police may play a role in the underreporting of domestic violence cases. Some of the reasons that these cases go underreported include:

> a [complainant's] lack of faith in Police being willing to take a domestic violence complaint seriously; complaints being withdrawn when victims and offenders reconcile; Police, community and family members encouraging women to reconcile [with their abusive partner]; police encouraging women to reconcile to protect the male perpetrators; a lack of awareness about a woman's right to safety; a belief that domestic violence is a family and not a Police matter (Kingi and Roguski, 2011, p. 16).

Some of these issues are well illustrated by a statement made by a Senior Police Officer: 'When we attend [domestic violence] cases, the first thing we have to do is to see if we can reconcile or whether we have to take it up the court. This is the Samoan way' (Kingi and Roguski, 2011, p. 20). Other reasons for low rates of reporting domestic violence incidents were suggested in the 2013 Community Perception Survey of the Samoan Police System, published by SBS: 'From experience, some of the unreported crimes were due to family reconciliations, village protocols, threats by offenders, and, mostly personal matters (SBS, 2013, p. 16).

In some villages, people cannot report a crime directly to the police, but instead must first bring the matter to the village fono, who

will then decide whether it ought to be referred to the police. An informant within the Ministry of Police and Prisons (2014) illustrates the challenges faced by some villagers to gain access to the police, using the village of Vaitoomuli as an example:

> In Vaitoomuli in Savaii there is an outpost. It is taboo to report a matter to the police directly. The matter must go to the village council who will then take it to the police. Every issue must go to the village council and it has been this way for a very long time (Boodoosingh, 2016, p. 230).

### *The Family Court and Family Violence Court*

The Family Court officially commenced operations in 2014 with the enactment of the Family Court Act, although it began seeing cases towards the end of 2013. The Court, which is the third of its kind in the Pacific Region (the other two being in New Zealand and Australia), hears matters related to protection orders, family law matters, divorce cases, guardianship, adoption, maintenance, and custody under the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Ordinance 1961. Matrimonial property matters are not within the jurisdiction of the Family Court and are heard by the Supreme Court (Sumner, 2015).

Prior to the establishment of these Courts, cases related to domestic and family matters, including domestic violence, were seen by the District Courts on specific days. The Family Court and the Family Violence Court sit in the same courtroom, each on allocated days of the week (Boodoosingh, 2016). Although the courtroom is based in Mulinu'u on Upolu, people in Savaii can have matters heard at the Tuasivi Court in Savaii when the Family Court travels on circuit (Sumner, 2015).

The Family Court is designed to operate in a friendly, less stressful, and informal atmosphere, where people can raise matters to the judge without the need for legal counsel. Allowance for traditional reconciliation mechanisms are factored into proceedings, such as when the court grants 10-day interim protection orders prior to deciding whether or not to make the order permanent. In accordance with the Community Justice Act 2008, customary apology (ifoga) and penalties imposed by village fono may also be considered by these courts determining the sentence for an offense.

## The Samoan Church and Violence Against Women

The church in Samoa was established nearly two hundred years ago and continues to be one of the most dominant institutions in village life. Samoa's population is primarily Christian, with the 2011 Census indicating that 99% of the population over the age of five years are affiliated with a church (SBS, 2012a). The church is an integral part of Samoan identity, having become indivisibly entwined in the country's culture since contact with missionaries from the 1830s.

In recent decades there has been evidence of shifts in membership rates of different churches. There are some indications of decline in EFKS and Methodist numbers (Thornton, Kerslake, & Binns, 2010, p. 7), alongside an increase in LDS Church membership, and stability in Catholic membership. Despite these denominational fluctuations, the overall position of the churches at the centre of Samoan social and cultural life remains firmly entrenched. Most

traditional villages have at least one church and the majority have more than one, usually from one of the three largest denominations (EFKS, Catholic, or Methodist; Meleisea et al., 2015). Churches are typically the most magnificent structures in villages. The preamble to the Samoan Constitution refers to Samoa as a country 'founded on God', and in 2017 it was amended to include mention of the Holy Trinity, stressing again that Samoa was founded on the Christian concept of God. Freedom of religion is protected in the constitution under Part II s 11.

Teachings from the pulpit have great influence on gender role development and perception of acceptable behaviour and conduct. The major churches in Samoa promote a conservative, patriarchal, and heteronormative view of Christianity. A woman is considered the helpmate of her husband and is expected to be obedient to him. Husbands, meanwhile, are assumed to be the head of the household. In the mainstream churches, a man cannot be appointed as a village pastor or a Roman Catholic catechist (teacher) unless he is married, and the pastor and his wife are perceived to be exemplars of a husband-wife relationship. And, although a pastor is not permitted to hold a matai title and cannot sit as a member of the village fono, many matai are deacons within their churches (Meleisea et al., 2015) and the fono is expected to protect church interests. For example, the fono holds authority to impose penalties for villagers who do not partake in mandated church activities or choose not to attend church. Conservative teachings on gender roles broadcast from the pulpit readily permeate the outlook of matai in the fono and shape their decision making and support for church values. Thus, while there is an official separation of church and state, in practice the church heavily influences village leadership and governance.

Research conducted by Meleisea et al. (2015) provides information on the roles women play in the church. In Samoa, the Methodist and Congregational Churches choose not to ordain women as ministers on the basis of Samoan custom, despite these denominations ordaining female ministers in other countries.[7] The Catholic the LDS churches are governed by central authorities external to Samoa. While the Catholic Church does not ordain female priests, there is no doctrine which specifies a gender restriction for becoming a catechist in the church. A catechist provides leadership and religious instruction in parishes, but in Samoa this role is held only by men. There are prescribed roles for men and women in the LDS church and only men may be elders, priests, and bishops. The EFKS permits women to be deacons, usually women who are single or widowed, in keeping with the norm that a woman takes her status from her husband; however, the majority of deacons are male matai. The Methodist Church has permitted women to be lay preachers in the past, but a recent change to the church constitution has stopped this. The conventional role for women in the village EFKS and Methodist churches is to be a member of the women's fellowship group. This group is led by the pastor's wife along with deacons' wives, and is responsible for keeping the church clean and attractive and running church fundraising and hospitality events.

### Potential Within the Churches

The social position and influence of churches in Samoa means that they have enormous potential to address VAW, but

this potential has yet to be implemented. In their report for the PPDVP, Fairbairn-Dunlop and Lievore (2007) note that, despite rich opportunities for religious leadership in Samoa to respond to VAW, the church has failed to give this matter precedence:

> Domestic violence was not a priority on the agenda of the mainstream churches. Comments were made that the church and the church ministry needed to look to their own practices first. At the same time, churches were seen to be the agencies which should be playing a lead role in addressing domestic violence and abuse issues (Fairbairn-Dunlop and Lievore, 2007, p. 37).

In recent years, a number of reports and policy initiatives have stated the importance of church action on this issue. The Samoan Government Second Progress Report (2010) highlighted the contribution that churches might make to VAW prevention:

> The churches should be heavily involved in addressing violence against women. It is proposed that a special taskforce be established with all the relevant authorities to adequately analyse and determine strategic interventions at all levels that would address violence against women effectively. The involvement of key NGOs such as Samoa Victim Support as well as the National Council of Churches would play a key role in consolidating appropriate interventions that would reduce violence against women (Government of Samoa, 2010, p. 30).

The report recommends advocacy campaigns at village, church, and community levels which would raise awareness of the key challenges Samoan women face (Government of Samoa, 2010). The PPDVP Nadi Symposium Accord (April 2014) also reinforced this message when it called upon religious leaders in the Pacific to show leadership on this issue: 'We urge religious leaders to champion the elimination of SGBV [sexual and gender-based violence] and to act with strong leadership in this regard. Religion or culture or tradition never justifies the use of sexual and gender based violence' (PPDVP, 2014).

The Nadi Accord was subsequently endorsed at the forty-fifth Pacific Islands Forum Leaders meeting in Palau 2014, where it was declared that culture, religion, and tradition can never be used as an excuse for abuse.

Opportunities for church involvement in responding to family violence were also documented in the recommendations shared by respondents and authors of the 2017 SFSS. A total of 68% of male respondents and 63% of female respondents chose the church as one of the preferred organisations to respond to VAW (MWCSD, 2017). Yet despite this, only 5% of respondents were aware of services provided by the church (MWCSD, 2017). In the 2006 SFHSS, of the minority of women who reported their abuse, only 1.2% disclosed to clergy. Yet the key role of the church in addressing family violence was identified in Recommendation 2 of the SFSS. The report also notes:

> Failing to live and follow Christian and cultural values is perceived as another cause of family violence. Le o i lotu (not being church members) is a commonly cited factor associated with families involved in violence. Family members and in particular the perpetrators are charged with failing to connect with their Christian and cultural values acquired from the church and family

> when dealing with problems at home (MWCSD, 2017, p. 101).

The MWCSD is identified as the key government implementing ministry which provides support and assistance to these efforts. Its responsibilities include:

> To work closely with the National Council of Churches (NCC) to promote matters of family safety from the Christian perspective, to work with the NCC to work with village councils to encourage church ministers to visit with families who live on the peripheries of the village on a regular basis, for the NCC to liaise with village councils to encourage church ministers to take part in village initiatives to counter family violence and to promote family safety, for the NCC to dedicate one Sunday of the year to discuss and conduct activities related to the theme of 'family safety' using children's White Sunday as a model and the NCC to encourage all faiths to join in the effort to address domestic violence in the country (MWCSD, 2017, p. 115).

### Aspects of Church Teaching and Practice Which Contribute to VAW

Alongside the obvious positive potential of churches to tackle VAW, there are some elements of church teaching which can be damaging and may contribute to perpetuating VAW. As Boodoosingh notes:

> It is unlikely that a church leader would preach a sermon that advocates the use of violence, yet conservative teachings may inadvertently imply that violence can sometimes be acceptable. Conservative thinking may justify the use of physical dominance to maintain control of a wife who is perceived to be out of line or seen to be insubordinate to her husband. A woman who is abused within this construct may be advised by church leadership to be more submissive and to self-reflect as to how her actions have resulted in a beating (Boodoosingh, 2016, p. 340).

Most commentators view the overall impact of churches in Samoa as part of the problem rather than the solution to tackling this issue. Furthermore, most argue that unless there is a radical change in some areas of church teaching it is unlikely that the churches will make a positive contribution. For example, when women were asked why they stayed in violent relationships, 31% of respondents cited reasons connected with Christian teaching, including the sanctity of marriage and the Christian emphasis on forgiveness (SPC, 2006).

Church teachings also play a part in influencing men's views on gender roles. All of the men in the SFHSS self-identified as church members (SPC, 2006). According to 10% of all male respondents and 20% of abusive male respondents, having a close relationship with God was regarded as a preventative mechanism against beating their wives (SPC, 2006). However, the significance of conservative teachings about wives being their husbands' helpmates and being subservient to them was evidenced by the fact that 77% of male respondents stated that women should show some form of obedience to their husband in order to avoid being beaten by him (SPC, 2006).

Boodoosingh (2016, p. 341) identifies a number of texts that are commonly given to justify the subordinate position of women and wives, including 1 Corinthians 11.3-9 and 14.34-35, Ephesians 5.22-24, and 1 Timothy 2:11-14. In addition to church

teachings on gender roles, there are other ways that churches can contribute to the problem. This includes church responsibility for financial, cultural, and interpersonal factors which contribute to Samoa's high rates of VAW. In a 2014 presentation to the Pacific Judicial Conference, Family Court Judge Leilani Tuala Warren pointed out that the universally identified causes of family violence such as jealousy, financial pressures, intoxication, and anger also apply to Samoa (Warren, 2014). However, in Samoa these wider factors may be linked to the church in ways that do not apply elsewhere. For example, the SPSS noted that the practice of fa'alavelave (giving) can be a contributing factor for VAW, because of the financial pressures it creates within the family, and 'differences of opinion' on how much to give (MWCD, 2017, p. 95). Macpherson and Macpherson (2011) cite data derived from the 2002 Household Income and Expenditure Survey that on average, the Samoan population spend about SAT$1 million a week on both cultural and church obligations. The pressure to give generously is further reinforced through the practice of folafola, when the name of the gift giver and material gifts are called out for the crowd at traditional events. While some believe that the practice of folafola pays homage to Samoan culture, it may also bring public shame on those who cannot contribute as much. A similar pressure extends when giving to churches. There is constant competition between different churches to have the most opulent church, and within churches there is competition among matai around who contributes more (Ernst, 1994, p. 168). Thornton et al. (2010, pp. 2-6) report that according to their survey, approximately 63% of Samoan households use remittances for social purposes, while 41% of remittances are typically given to the church. They cite the 1997 Housing Income Expenditure Survey, which showed expenditure of WST$5.7 million per year on church obligations and WST$ 34.8 million per year on traditional ceremonials (such as funerals).

Another way churches may contribute to VAW is that members of the clergy are not above participating in VAW themselves. Unfortunately, abusive clergy can use their social influence and relationship with the fono to avoid accountability. This sets a disastrous precedent in terms of providing a role model for other men. Even when a member of clergy is taken to task, he is less likely to be penalised in the same way as other villagers, with responses differing from church to church. In the EFKS church, a pastor (faifeau) may be asked to leave the village. This can occur as EFKS pastors have contracts with the congregation, which may be cancelled or renewed over time. Other churches with more centralised authority may punish their clergy in different ways.

Despite this relative impunity, some clergy have appeared in court on charges of spousal abuse and indecent assault. In one case involving a Catholic catechist (*P v Paulo* [2002] WSSC 1), the defendant had been charged with one count of indecent assault which carried a maximum penalty of seven years. The defendant had come before the court for a similar matter of indecent assault in 1992, but the church had retained him as a catechist despite the case. The fact that the church allowed the offender to continue to have access to vulnerable members of the church community implies a degree of acceptance and tolerance of gender violence by church authorities.

Church members and clergy may also be implicated in VAW by virtue of their

complicity in perpetuating certain stereotypes and misperceptions around gender violence. In both the churches and wider society, victim-blaming is a common response to women who experience violence (Schoeffel et al., 2018). Even when the victim is not directly blamed, many women who experience violence fear shame and stigma within their communities and churches (Boodoosingh, 2015). In victim impact statements shared with the courts, church members have been documented as blaming victims of assault and sexual violence, and in some cases, victims are prohibited from participating in church activities. In the case of a 26-year-old male teacher who pled guilty to several charges involving unlawful sexual intercourse, attempted indecent assault, and indecent assault of teenage female students at the school where he taught, one of the victims reported in her victim impact statement that she had 'suffered the taunts and scolding by her parents and fellow church members' and felt 'shame for the conduct' (*P v Tuiletufuga* [2013] WSSC 126). The Court may also consider character references provided by a defendant's pastor or priest as mitigating factors in sentencing. The veracity of these statements was questioned recently by participants of an advocacy training programme held by the Family Health Planning Organisation (Taumata, 2017). By providing character references for offenders, the church does not hold offenders culpable and does not support victims.

## Opportunities for a Faith-Based Response to Violence Against Women

Despite the difficulties outlined above, the moral authority of churches in Samoa means that they are well placed for leadership on transforming social attitudes to VAW if they strongly commit to this. For example, in the SPC (2006), most respondents accepted that violence was normal (72.5%); those who had suffered abuse cited this as the reason why they did not seek help. If churches offer clear messages that VAW is both unacceptable and illegal – both a sin *and* a crime – this would help to challenge the social acceptance of VAW in Samoan culture and church life.

Additionally, almost 90% of all women respondents in the 2006 SPC considered domestic violence a private matter, but a similar number of respondents thought it was also acceptable to seek external intervention. This apparent contradiction could be due to the fact that the intervention of external agencies (such as the police, courts, and healthcare providers) allows women to continue to appear 'obedient' to their husbands, while simultaneously getting the support and help they need. The churches could do more to signal that the shame of VAW belongs with the perpetrator and not the victim and ensure that women who seek help from their pastors are supported instead of being blamed.

Policy discussion of VAW prevention initiatives is usually framed within a rights-based approach, which provides strong support for women's rights and gender equality. Unfortunately, some church members and leaders view rights-based discourse as unfamiliar and even alien. This has contributed to VAW being marginalised as a church concern and prevention initiatives becoming low priorities. In some cases, churches have mistakenly seen rights-based concern for VAW as opposed to traditional faith-based church teaching. A clearer appreciation of the positive values underlying rights and right-based approaches might help avoid the unnecessary opposition

between rights-based and faith-based positions. Likewise, a clearer awareness of faith-based resources to address VAW can also help churches offer a stronger voice alongside rights-based approaches (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2016).

The National Public Inquiry into Family Violence report (OONHRI, 2018) gives attention to the contribution that churches might make to wider prevention initiatives. The Inquiry was chaired by Ombudsman Maiava Iulai Toma, who is an active lay member at Samoa's sole Anglican church. Two weeks before the launch of the National Human Rights Institution in December 2013, Maiava Iulai Toma had preached a sermon titled 'Breaking the Silence' to mark the upcoming '16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence' campaign.[8] He called on churches to be more supportive of women experiencing violence and challenged church practices which are likely to sustain violence rather than prevent violence:

> The church should be a safe place for women to come and tell their story and to seek comfort. They should not be told to go home to pray more, to submit more and to turn the other cheek. The church should support them in the sure knowledge that it is not God's will that they and their children should live with constant violence and intimidation in their lives (Toma, 2013).

The sermon stressed that above all 'the most important task unique to the church is to not allow the Bible to be used to support the inequality of women' (Toma, 2013). This is crucial because, as mentioned above, some biblical verses are widely used to justify or excuse violence against women (Boodoosingh, 2016). The selective misuse of biblical texts should be questioned and challenged in light of more recent biblical scholarship. Biblical texts which offer a more positive message about gender roles and relationships also need to be given more prominence (Boodoosingh, 2016, pp. 341-42). A positive biblical message promoted by the churches can and should be offered as an effective response to gender-based violence. Biblical texts affirm the dignity and sacred value of all people, as created in the image of God, and highlight the destructive consequences that violence creates for individuals, families, and communities. Sustained work with biblical texts may therefore make two critical contributions towards a shift in attitudes towards VAW within the churches. First it will address the temptation for churches to dismiss VAW prevention as a purely secular issue of little concern to them. Second, it will offer generative resources that allow church members to recognise ways in which their church may be part of the problem. This can promote open and productive discussions about how churches might participate in prevention initiatives and take leadership on prevention strategies from a faith-based perspective alongside a rights-based approach (Toma, 2013). The National Public Inquiry into Family Violence presents human rights, fa'asamoa, and faith as the three pillars on which a prevention strategy can be effectively developed (OONHRI, 2018). However, it is clear that this will require significant change within churches, since 'the church is currently doing more to propagate views which lead to family violence than play a role in its prevention' (OONHRI, 2018, p. 215).

A number of Pacific approaches to contextual biblical studies are already available to support progress in this area, but

there is still much work to be done. Some of the resources which are available are underused or not used at all. For example, *The church and violence against women* theological college coursebook (Weavers, 2006, 2011) illustrates the churches' resistance to change. The coursebook was the result of a collaborative regional project pioneered by Rev. Dr Joan A. Filemoni-Tofaeono as co-ordinator of the Weavers committee on violence against women. The initial steps were a forum in 2003 and a regional workshop in 2004 to raise awareness of the impacts of violence against women and children. Following these meetings, the Weavers committee developed a draft of materials for a regional curriculum consultation of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) in 2006. SPATS had originated in 1969 as a regional ecumenical organisation in the Pacific with a Secretariat Office in Suva. The intention was that this coursebook would be used in theological institutions affiliated to SPATS. Endorsement by SPATS was important because it is the recognised accrediting body for theological colleges throughout the Pacific and is committed to promoting and maintaining high standards in theological education. The SPATS consultation helped in the final design of this study material and its subsequent publication in November 2006 (Weavers, 2006), edited by Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, who had succeeded Filemoni-Tofaeono as co-ordinator of the Weavers committee.

The course book is designed for use in theological colleges and runs to over 150 pages. It includes four teaching units offering a regional perspective on violence against women, human rights and violence, violence against women and the Bible, and the churches and their role in overcoming violence. This is followed by a range of readings to extend each unit. The pedagogical principles behind the approach draw upon the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, and are well suited to a talanoa (dialogue) approach to theological training (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2009). Shaista Shammeen (director of the Fiji Human Rights Commission) welcomed the anticipated contribution of the coursebook in her speech at the launch event held at Pacific Theological College, Suva:

> Violence against women which is a reality in all our cultures in the Pacific, has been a taboo subject for far too long. This course book will undoubtedly have the effect of ensuring that violence against women is properly discussed and debated as one of the worst evils of our society, one that undermines women's integrity, independence, self-esteem, and the ability to live as normal human beings (Shameem, 2006).

Ah Siu-Maliko's words in the coursebook foreword, that 'This is Weavers dream come true', reflects the aspirations Weavers originally had for the work (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2006, p. 4). It was hoped that this training would 'see the church playing more of a leading role in domestic violence advocacy, training and support' (Fairbairn-Dunlop & Lievore, 2007, p. 37). However, in practice, despite recognition from SPATS, the resource was not taken up with enthusiasm, and the use of the course book in theological schools has been very limited. A subsequent Weavers initiative translated the work and made it available in Samoan (Weavers, 2011), Fijian, Tahitian, Pidgin, Kiribati, and Tongan. Despite the value and availability of the coursebook, it appears that it is still not deployed in the theological institutions for

whom it was developed. Sustained work needs to be done within the churches if such resources are to contribute towards a new approach to VAW.

The elevated social status accorded to churches in Samoa means that they are very well placed to publicly challenge mistaken attitudes about victim blame, shame, and stigma. As mentioned above, women who experience gender-based violence are more likely to be blamed than supported by both community and church members. Church leadership in this area would be a positive response to the 'double victimisation' of women experiencing violence. Churches can offer clear messages that victims of gender violence are not to blame, and are not alone, and that the shame of VAW belongs with perpetrators, not victims. When the church is silent and fails to offer a clear message against VAW it damages its own credibility. The silence of the church and the community on VAW is not neutral. It is experienced by survivors as judgemental and harmful. A failure to speak helps to sustain a culture of impunity for perpetrators and often reinforces the sense of shame for victims.

## Conclusion

Samoa is a small island nation with strong church membership and traditional rules and customs that shape life in the islands. These customs have implications for the role of women in family, work, and political life. Women are underrepresented in leadership due to presumed cultural beliefs that prohibit women from obtaining matai titles in most villages. Studies have recorded very high rates of VAW in Samoa, with estimates as high as 60%. Very few women seek any support or help when they experience violence. VAW is often accepted within families and communities with most adults agreeing that it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife under certain conditions, including if she is disobedient, refuses sex, or neglects the children.

Recent law and policy changes have attempted to address VAW. Under the Crimes Act 2013, rape carries the maximum sentence of life imprisonment, and recognises the occurrence of rape within marriage. The recent no drop policy requires that all reports of VAW are fully investigated by the police and courts. Despite these advances, difficulties remain in addressing VAW in Samoa. This is due in part to pervasive beliefs that it is a woman's role to please and obey her husband. Also, while a village governance structure allows villages to discipline those who commit violence, there are cases where the victim and her family are punished instead, under the belief that she must have provoked the rape. This makes it difficult for victims to feel comfortable or safe when making a complaint.

There are a number of social service organisations that can provide support to women experiencing violence. One service that is dedicated to supporting victims of VAW in Samoa is the Samoa Victim Support Group. They provide some support for women experiencing violence, although their ability to offer shelter, particularly for children, is very limited.

There is a pressing need for more research into the prevalence of VAW in Samoa, as existing research is patchy. Studies have not been conducted with the frequency or consistency of methodology to provide an accurate estimate of the issues involved. Of equal importance is the development of culturally appropriate interventions to reduce attitudes supportive of VAW and the perpetration of VAW.

Moreover, there is a need for more research into how Samoan churches can respond to VAW along the lines indicated by the National Public Inquiry (OONHRI, 2018). Church leadership and religious teaching have a powerful impact on social values, attitudes, and behaviour. The churches play a central role in Samoan society and have huge potential to be proactively involved in responses to VAW. The importance of this has been increasingly highlighted in recent policy proposals. However, to date, very few churches have sufficiently embraced these opportunities. Some members of the church see VAW as an issue which is distant from church concerns, others deny that the problem really exists, while others seek to shift the blame onto victims. There has been little discussion on how church teachings and church practices may contribute directly and indirectly to the problem of VAW and to perceptions of its acceptability. To complicate the picture further, some inside the church view VAW initiatives as unduly rights-based and therefore as alien, or even hostile, to the churches' faith-based concerns. It is rare for VAW to be openly discussed in church settings and so negative and unhelpful attitudes to VAW are often left unexamined, or accepted by default. The experiences of women need to be heard within the church rather than being silenced or marginalised. A deeper conversation on VAW is therefore urgently needed within Samoan churches. This conversation might offer a clearer recognition of the role of power and control in perpetuating VAW and the need to address VAW as both a sin and a crime.

## Notes

1 The briefing was written as background to support the New Zealand Institute for Pacific Research project *Tatala le Ta'ui a le Atua: Rolling Out the Fine Mat of Scripture* on the potential for churches in Samoa to support solutions to reduce VAW. The image suggested in this title is the rolling out of a fine Pacific mat for an honest conversation on an important issue in a respectful manner.

2 EFKS is the acronym for the Samoan name Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa. The acronym CCCS for the English term (Congregational Christian Church of Samoa) is also sometimes used in academic literature. The Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Amerika Samoa (EFKAS), or Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa (CCAS), split from EFKS/CCCS in the 1980s.

3 When a family has more than one member with a *matai* title the decision on who will be the primary *matai* is made by the *matai* of the family.

4 The National Human Rights Institution in Samoa was launched as an operation within the Office of the Ombudsman on 10 December 2013. The date intentionally coincided with International Human Rights Day, which marks the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

5 There are no minimum penalties stipulated in the Crimes Act 2013, a weakness noted in the legislation by a 2007 report on Samoa's CEDAW Legislative Compliance Review (Forster and Jivan, 2007).

6 The Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme (PPDVP) is an initiative of the New Zealand Agency for International Development, New Zealand Police, and the Pacific Islands Chiefs of Police. The programme builds on earlier support from these agencies for domestic violence prevention in the Pacific. For a regional perspective on VAW in the Pacific, see UN Women (2011).

7 In American Samoa the EFKAS/CCAS first ordained a woman minister in 2006. Other women have been ordained since, but the number is still low, and ordained women still face barriers to advancement.

8 The Sunday prior to the '16 Days of Activism' campaign has been used as an opportunity for churches to raise awareness of the issues and signal support for activities during the campaign. The churches in Fiji have taken a regional lead on this and Maiava Iulai Toma's sermon drew on a sermon by Rev. Ann Drummond of the Volunteer House of Sarah, Fiji.

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NEW ZEALAND INSTITUTE FOR PACIFIC RESEARCH

# Section 3
# Conference Report

# 'Fola le ta'ui le Atua: Rolling out the Fine Mat of Scripture'

*Caroline Blyth*

## Summary

The 'Fola le ta'ui le Atua | Rolling out the fine Fine Mat of Scripture' project asked how Samoan churches can best participate in wider efforts to tackle the country's high rates of violence against women. This conference report outlines some of the goals, challenges, and outcomes of the project, using as its focus a June 2018 conference presentation about the project by its lead researcher, Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko. This presentation captures the aims, motivations, and challenges of 'Fola le ta'ui a le Atua', as well as illuminating the crucial role that Ah Siu-Maliko has played in shaping the project's philosophy.

### Introduction

In 2017, I was invited to join a research project, 'Fola le ta'ui a le Atua: Rolling Out the Mat of Scripture. Church Responses to Gender-Based Violence Against Women in Samoa: Supporting Church Capacity for Transformative Social Leadership'. The project has investigated how Samoan churches can best participate in wider national efforts to tackle the troublingly high rates of violence against women (VAW) reported in this island nation. It was funded by the New Zealand Institute for Pacific Research (NZIPR), and has involved a group of researchers affiliated with the Universities of Auckland and Otago, and the National University of Samoa. The project lead was Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, a lecturer at Piula Theological College, Samoa and research affiliate at the University of Otago's Centre for Theology and Public Issues. Professor David Tombs (Howard Paterson Chair of Theology and Public Issues, University of Otago) was the principal investigator. I served as co-investigator along with Dr Melanie Beres, senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Gender Studies, and Social Work at the University of Otago. Other members of the team included Dr Ramona Boodoosingh, senior lecturer in the School of Nursing and Health Science, National University of Samoa, and Dr Tess Patterson, senior lecturer in the Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Otago.

The primary aims of the project were fourfold:

1. To investigate current attitudes within Samoan churches about VAW, particularly their understanding of VAW as a pastoral and public issue. The project looked at the level of church support for tackling VAW, as well as church norms and structures which might sustain this violence. In particular, the project sought to assess the extent to which there may (or may not) be a disconnect between Samoan church responses to VAW and international, national, and local initiatives on VAW prevention.

2. To develop contextual and participatory group Bible study resources that could be used to foster church conversations about VAW. These resources are grounded in biblical and theological

scholarship, focusing on biblical texts that speak to the issue of VAW. They also include texts that are sometimes used to justify the subordination of women (particularly in marital relationships) and, consequently, to excuse domestic violence.

3. To pilot and assess the impact of these Bible study resources in Samoa, introducing them in a series of workshops delivered to church groups, theological students, and women's groups. These workshops would be guided by the transformative and dialogical pedagogy pioneered by Brazilian educator and philosopher, Paulo Freire.

4. To consider the practical decisions, actions, and policy recommendations that church leaders might take in response to the Nadi Accord 2014, in light of the issues raised by the project. The Nadi Accord arose from the Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme, and declared that culture, tradition, and religion ought never to be used as an 'excuse for abuse'. It also called on religious leaders to 'champion the elimination of SGBV [sexual and gender-based violence] and to act with strong leadership in this regard' (Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Programme, 2014).

Throughout the project, there has been a range of conferences and conversations with colleagues in Samoa, Fiji, and Aotearoa New Zealand, including a conference held at the University of Auckland's Fale Pasifika on 11 June 2018. The conference, titled 'Tatala le ta'ui a le Atua: Church responses to gender violence in Samoa', aimed to initiate new conversations between academics, researchers, church pastors, and community activists about the role of the church (in Samoa and the wider Pacific region) in tackling VAW. The conference included presentations from three esteemed keynote speakers: Dr Ah Siu-Maliko, Rev. Dr Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono[1] (lecturer at Kanana Fou Theological Seminary, Tafuna, American Samoa), and Rev. Dr Nasili Vaka'uta (Principal of Trinity Methodist College, Auckland). In the afternoon, there was a screening of the 2015 documentary *Sisi le Lā'afa – Raise the Sennit Sail*, directed by Galumalemana Steven Percival. Following the screening, there were group discussion sessions, where attendees could share their responses to and reflections on the documentary, which highlights the complex intersections between religion, cultural tradition, and VAW in Samoa.

In this research report, I focus on the keynote presentation delivered at the conference by Dr Ah Siu-Maliko, *Tatala le ta'ui a le Atua (Rolling out the fine mat of scripture): Constraints and opportunities* (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018).[2] I have chosen this as the basis of my report as it captures so beautifully the aims, motivations, and challenges of the wider 'Fola le ta'ui a le Atua' project, not to mention the vital role that Ah Siu-Maliko has played in shaping the philosophy that underpins it.

At the start of her presentation, Ah Siu-Maliko spoke about how important it is for researchers to feel connected and committed to their work, particularly when this involves the vital issue of gender-based violence. She described her own 'passion' for researching VAW in Samoa, and her commitment to speaking openly about it in order to bring about positive change in Samoan churches and society (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). 'Gender-based violence is

part of my being', she admitted, 'I wake up thinking about gender-based violence. When I breathe, it's gender-based violence. When I look around – my whole being is dominated by this issue' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018).

Referring to some of the recently published reports which record the growing rates of violence against women and girls in Samoa, Ah Siu-Maliko noted that there have been a number of responses to these reports from government ministries, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and some religious institutions, many of whom have initiated projects to challenge VAW. Nevertheless, she voiced a wariness about the motivations underpinning these projects: 'It seems like there is a competition, to develop resources and engage in workshops. But the question that I ask – are we doing it for funding? Or are we connecting ourselves to what we're doing?' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018).

Moreover, Ah Siu-Maliko noted that there is still one key voice absent from the conversation about gender-based violence in Samoa – the 'prophetic voice' of the Samoan church (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). While Fijian church leaders have recently made a public commitment to VAW prevention initiatives, including participation in the country's 16 Days of Activism campaign (United Nations Development Programme, 2017), the Samoan church has remained relatively silent, preferring not to engage actively with government and NGO initiatives that aim to tackle the crisis of VAW in Samoa. It is this silence that Ah Siu-Maliko seeks to break, in her capacity as a member of the Methodist church in Samoa, a lecturer at Piula Theological College, a public theologian, and a 'concerned citizen of Samoa' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). In these intersecting roles, Ah Siu-Maliko spoke of her determination to move out of her 'comfort zone' to 'mingle with the vulnerable in Samoan society' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). Yet, as she admitted, she has faced a number of challenges along the way, which she refers to throughout the rest of her presentation.

After these introductory remarks, Ah Siu-Maliko explained the context of tatala le ta'ui a le Atua – rolling out the fine mat of scripture. The phrase conveys the importance of being relational in Samoan culture, and the Samoan belief that the self takes its form from maintaining relationships: 'It articulates the necessity to reconnect with one's God, and sisters, neighbours, and environment in order to reveal one's genuine self-identity rooted in relationships of respect' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). In Samoan culture, ta'ui has a particular use, referring to the finest woven mats, which have been cared for and cherished over the years within their Samoan homes. These mats are old and delicate, and are only rolled out in public on special occasions. When they are, those present often get 'goosebumps' when they witness the mat's beauty (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). At this point in the presentation, Ah Siu-Maliko and David Tombs rolled out a large ta'ui that was lying, rolled up, beside the presenter's lectern. As Ah Siu-Maliko explained, the conference is indeed a special occasion where the ta'ui can be unrolled, as it is an opportunity to talk about a vital issue affecting not only Samoans but the entire world (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). The phrase tatala le ta'ui a le Atua also emphasises the significant role of the Bible in this conversation; the fine mat of scripture has to be rolled out to transform human relationships, including those damaged by violence.

Ah Siu-Maliko also spoke about some of the constraints and challenges she has faced

researching gender-based violence in Samoa. The first challenge she discussed was her status as an 'insider researcher' – a Samoan woman theologian researching a Samoan issue (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). As she noted, a researcher's 'insiderness' can be of benefit, as long as it does not bias their study; for example, her identity as a Samoan woman has facilitated safe and honest communication with the Samoan women she interviewed during the course of her research (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). Moreover, her Samoan identity has also allowed her to represent faithfully Samoan understandings and worldviews and to engage critically with scholarly research about Samoa (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018).

Another research challenge that Ah Siu-Maliko raised was that, although VAW is a public issue in Samoa, it is often regarded as a 'woman's issue', with which men are reluctant to engage (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). She noted that some male participants in her research interviews appeared to feel uncomfortable talking about the topic, resorting to humour in an attempt to evade having serious conversations (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). She was also aware that some men did not want to participate in her research in case others thought she was interviewing them because *they* were perpetrators of gender-based violence (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). As she noted, 'Finding ways to engage with this issue in a public arena when it has historically been shrouded in silence and secrecy has required great sensitivity and patience' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). Being an 'insider researcher' in this project has therefore been of great value here, allowing her to approach these difficult conversations with greater understanding.

Yet, Ah Siu-Maliko admitted in her presentation, patience is sometimes hard to come by when there is still so much work to be done. She therefore described her role as lead researcher in the Fola le ta'ui le Atua project as a 'God-given opportunity' that has allowed her to begin urgent dialogues with Samoan churches about their role in tackling VAW (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). She noted without irony that her academic status allowed her to speak to those in the 'upper level of Samoan society', such as male church leaders (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018).[3] Most importantly, though, much of her research has been guided by the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, whose pedagogy is rooted in the imperative to see everyone's potential, regardless of their life situations, and to treat research participants as agentic subjects rather than passive objects. Drawing on Freire's work has allowed Ah Siu-Maliko to forge strong and fruitful networks with Samoan women from all walks of life, including women in leadership positions. And, while challenges remain and progress can appear awfully slow, she reminded the conference audience that 'it's about taking small steps, with passion and love' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018).

Ah Siu-Maliko also took time during the conference presentation to discuss the preliminary findings of her research. She admitted that initial analysis of her interviews with Samoan church leaders and members has provided her with an 'eye-opening opportunity', both to assess the extent of work already being done by churches to address VAW and to consider what else they could and should be doing. After studying her interview data closely, she coded the data into nine thematic categories:

(1) the (general) role of the church in Samoa; (2) the (more specific) role of the church in responding to social issues; (3) thoughts on VAW; (4) preventing VAW; (5) helping families affected by VAW; (6) the role of the church in addressing VAW; (7) biblical texts used as justification for VAW; (8) using sacred texts to challenge VAW, and; (9) affirming the sacred value and dignity of all people.

Focusing on categories 1, 3, and 6, Ah Siu-Maliko noted that these themes in particular highlight the realities of church responses to VAW (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). Of especial interest, her research findings uncovered an overall philosophy that guides Samoan relationships and engagements: as she puts it, 'keeping the face, or keeping the front matters tidy' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). While some of her research participants understood this as an enactment of the Samoan concept of teu le va (respecting and honouring the relational space between two people; McRobie &Agee, 2017), Ah Siu-Maliko contended that it is, nevertheless, a key contributing factor to gender-based violence being hidden, or, as she put it, 'swept under the carpet as if it's not a problem' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). She also noted that this philosophy was particularly evident in the responses she received during her interviews with church leaders and NGOs in Samoa. The only exceptions to this were some of her female interviewees, who admitted that the confidential space afforded by the interviews gave them 'a moment of liberation from the fear of the status quo' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). Speaking openly about gender-based violence is still taboo in many cultures and countries around the world, and Samoa is no different. Yet, as the 'Fola le ta'ui le Atua' project has found, the silence that often surrounds VAW only perpetuates the sense of shame and stigma experienced by its victims (NZIPR, 2018). In both Samoan churches and wider society, women who are victims of gender-based violence are more likely to be blamed than offered support; even when they are not directly blamed, many still fear the stigma they will encounter in their local communities and churches. The church's silence about VAW is therefore never neutral, but can often be harmful (NZIPR, 2018).

Ah Siu-Maliko also stressed that her research provided her with a valuable opportunity to engage with the wider Samoan public and thus to create concrete platforms from which work can be done to tackle VAW (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). It has also enabled her to develop strong networks with other women who stand with her on the 'battlefield', waging war against those systems and ideologies that sustain VAW. In these networks, she noted, 'we are not only developing and sharing resources, but nurturing human relationships as a way to prevent violence against women' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018).

Ah Siu-Maliko ended her presentation by offering the audience a glimpse of the 'end product' of her research, which incorporates one of the key goals of the 'Fola le ta'ui le Atua' project. Drawing on material from her research interviews, and working alongside biblical scholars and theologians (including myself and David Tombs), she has developed a series of Bible studies for use in Samoan churches to foster dialogue about VAW. Based on the transformational model of Paulo Freire, these Bible studies aim to liberate people through the process of self-awareness and consciousness raising (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). The studies eschew passive learning and encourage participants to think and speak for themselves, giving

them the confidence to break the silence that surrounds VAW. As Ah Siu-Maliko explains, the studies are not a 'quick fix' to VAW, but rather move participants from reflection to concrete action as part of an ongoing process (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). Crucially, these Bible studies draw churches into this process, enabling them to dialogue openly about VAW, to participate in tackling VAW, and to offer healing and support to those impacted by it. The Bible studies also break the silence surrounding VAW in Samoan society, inviting members of the Samoan churches to publicly challenge the shame and stigma that many victims experience. Churches clearly have massive potential to lead the way in tackling VAW, but they need to recognise and embrace this as an integral part of their mission and ministry at both national and international levels (NZIPR, 2018). Ah Siu-Maliko's Bible studies offer an invitation to the Samoan church to recognize this potential and to begin taking action; as such, they are worth their weight in gold.

Ah Siu-Maliko concluded her presentation by noting that her participation in the 'Fola le ta'ui le Atua' project has reminded her of the importance of knowing herself – 'my tūrangawaewae – my standing place – and believing I can be a part of making a positive change' (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018). She acknowledged that her commitment to making change is an ongoing process that affects her personally at every level – her self, her family, her church, her nation. But, as she noted:

> Every little step counts, as they are steps driven by a passion and conviction to enhance the common good of Samoans and all of God's people. God did not put me here for no reason. There is a purpose for everything. And despite the challenges entailed in combatting gender-based violence, we are discovering in our faith tradition and our sacred scriptures resources that can guide us towards liberation and empowerment (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2018).

It has been a privilege working with Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko on the 'Fola le ta'ui le Atua' project, along with the other researchers who made up the project team, and also those who participated at the Auckland conference. As she observed in her presentation, those of us working to end gender-based violence find ourselves very quickly on a 'battlefield', waging war against the systems, ideologies, and structures that sustain such violence. This work can be exhausting and demoralizing, but we support each other, and draw strength from each other, refusing to give up while there is still so much work to be done. And, as Ah Siu-Maliko reminds us, 'Every little step counts'.

## Notes

1 Rev. Dr Filemoni-Tofaeono is co-author (with Lydia Johnson) of the ground-breaking book, Reweaving the Relational Mat: A Christian Response to Violence against Women from Oceania (2006). Prior to Ah Siu-Maliko taking over the role, she also co-ordinated Weavers: Women in Theological Education, which developed resources for use by theological colleges to open up dialogue about violence against women in Oceania (Weavers 2006).

2 The other two keynote addresses at the 'Tatala le ta'ui a le Atua' conference were presented by Rev. Dr Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono, University of Auckland, Embrace our Voice: A call to re-image Tama'ita'i Samoana (women) in the image of God, and Dr Nasili Vaka'uta, Trinity Theological College, Auckland, #MeToo: Troubling 'Sexual Abuse' in Scriptures. Links to the video recordings of all three keynote addresses can be accessed on the NZIPR website at https://www.nzipr.ac.nz/2018/07/04/tatala-le-taui-a-le-atua-rolling-out-the-fine-mat-of-scripture/

2 Dr Ah Siu-Maliko is the first Samoan woman to be awarded a PhD in theology, and the first to be appointed to a teaching position in a Samoan theological college. For an overview of her research, see Ah Siu-Maliko (2016).

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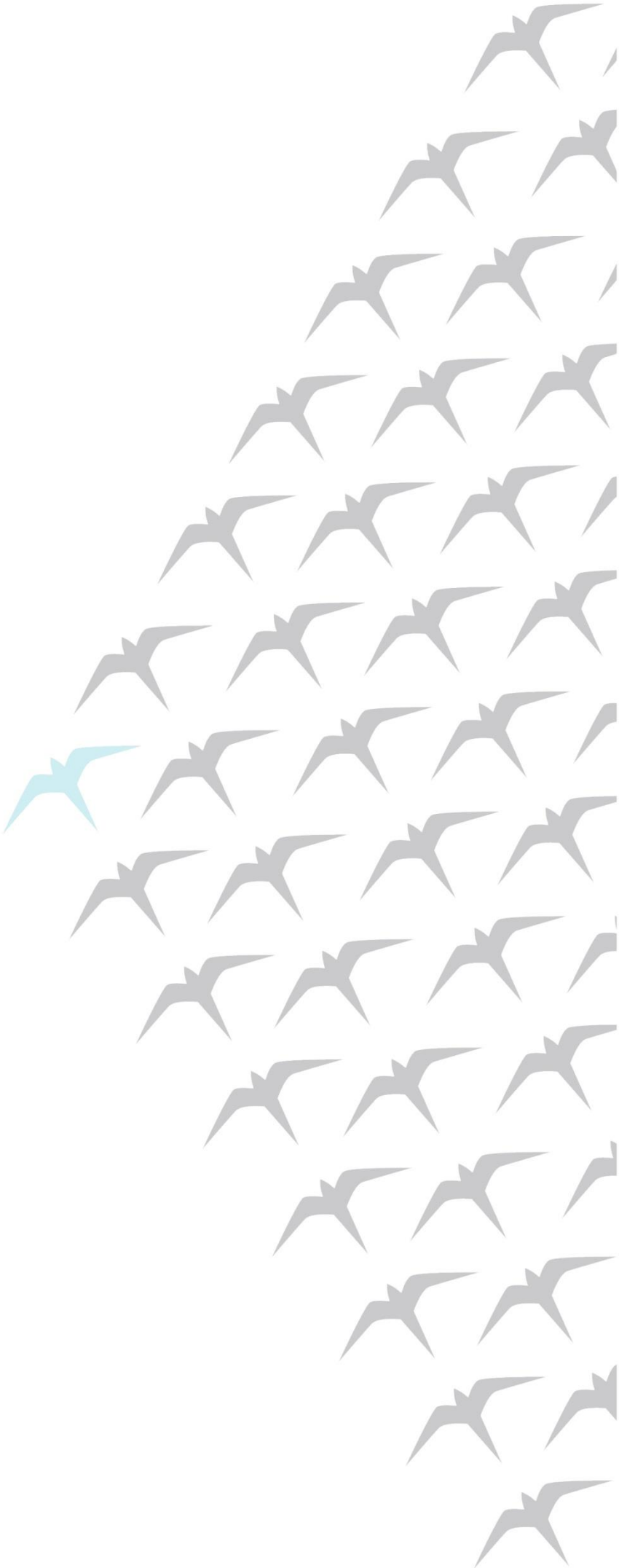
# Appendix 1: List of Main Project Events

- **5 September 2017**. Research team orientation and presentations. 'Church Responses to Violence Against Women in Samoa: Identifying the Issues and Developing a Transformative Response'. Venue: University of Otago.
- **6 September 2017**. Public presentation. Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, 'Using the Biblical Story of Tamar to Address Violence Against Women in Samoa'. Venue: First Church of Otago, Dunedin.
- **7 September**. Research team planning workshop. Venue: University of Otago.
- **8 September 2017**. Public presentations. Dr Seforosa Carroll, 'Church Responses to Violence Against Women in the Pacific'; Dr Richard Davis, 'The Sin of Disobedience and the Violence of Obedience'. Venue: St John's Presbyterian Church in the City, Wellington.
- **8 September 2017**. Public presentation. Dr Ramona Boodoosingh, 'Violence Against Women, Education, and Healthy Relationships'. Venue: University of Auckland.
- **9-11 October 2017**. Planning meetings. Prof. David Tombs and Dr Richard Davis. Venue: Suva.
- **12 October 2017**. Public lecture. Prof. Tombs. Venue: Pacific Theological College (PTC), Suva.
- **13 October 2017**. Participation in day-conference. Prof. Tombs and Dr Davis at 'Weaving our Pacific Mat: A Seminar on Masculinities Research in the Pacific Island Countries'. Venue: University of South Pacific, Suva.
- **2 November 2017**. Presentation. Dr Ah Siu-Maliko, 'Workshop on Family Violence'. Venue: Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration (MJCA) of Samoa, Apia.
- **15 March 2018.** Public lecture. Prof. Tombs, 'Church Responses to Violence Against Women as a Global Concern'. Venue: Centre for Samoan Studies, National University of Samoa, Apia.
- **16 March 2018.** NZIPR day-conference. 'Tatala le Ta'ui a le Atua | Rolling Out the Fine Mat of Scripture'. Venue: Piula Theological College,
- **19 March 2018**. Seminar. Prof. Tombs and Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, 'Church Reponses to Violence Against Women as a Global Concern' hosted by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD). Venue: MWCSD, Apia.
- **9-10 April 2018**. Forum. Prof. Tombs participated in 'Civil Society and Faith Groups Collaborate for Gender Equality', organised by Uniting World (Australia). Venue: Pacific Theological College, Suva.
- **12-13 April 2018.** NZIPR Suva conference. 'Churches Tackling Gender-Based Violence: Preventing Violence, Reporting Perpetrators, Restoring Survivors'. Hosted by Rev Prof Feleterika Uili Nokise, Dr Richard Davis, and colleagues. Venue: Pacific Theological College, Suva. http://ptc.ac.fj/?p=1618

- **7 June 2018**. NZIPR seminar. Prof. Malama Meleisea, National University of Samoa, 'Violence Against Women in Samoa: Challenges and Opportunities'; Associate Professor Penelope Schoeffel, National University of Samoa, 'All About Eve: Women's Attitudes to Gender-Based Violence in Samoa'. Prof. David Tombs, University of Otago, 'Violence Against Women in Samoa: Challenges and Opportunities for the Churches'. Venue: University of Auckland.
- **8 June 2018**. NZIPR panel discussion. 'Church Responses to Violence Against Women' chaired by Rev Dr Frank Smith. Panellists: Dr Emily Colgan, Rev. Dr Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono, and Prof. David Tombs. Venue: St John's Theological College, Auckland.
- **9 June 2018**. NZIPR Bible Studies with Pacific Churches. Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, at St John's Theological College, Auckland.
- **11 June 2018**. NZIPR Day-conference. 'Tatala le Ta'ui a le Atua: Church Responses to Gender Violence in Samoa'. Speakers; Rev Dr Joan Alleluia Filemoni-Tofaeono; Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko; Dr Nasili Vaka'uta. Plus screening and discussion of *Sisi le Lā 'afa – Raise the Sennit Sail,* a documentary by Galumalemana Steven Percival. Venue: Fale Pasifika, University of Auckland. https://tatalaletaui.wordpress.com
- **4-6 Sept. 2018**. Presentation. Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, 'Transforming the Church's Response to Violence against Women in Samoa' at Samoa Conference IV. Venue: National University of Samoa, Apia.
- **18-25 Oct. 2018.** CEDAW Session. Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko was the NGO representative at UN CEDAW 71st Session. Veune: Geneva.
- **29-30 Nov. 2018.** NZIPR Islands and Oceans: A Conference for Pacific Research. Dr Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko, 'Gender Equality as a Transformative Response to Ending Violence Against Women in Samoa'; Dr Melanie Beres, 'Church leaders' Perspectives on Violence Against Women in Samoa'. Venue: Fale Pasifika, University of Auckland.



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