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Fetu'utu'una'i le vā
Navigating relational space:

**An exploration of traditional and contemporary pastoral
counselling practices for Samoans**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at Massey University, Albany
New Zealand

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2017

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Abstract

Pastoral counselling is one of the important roles of ministers in Samoa. An emerging ethos of individualism is challenging traditional notions of collectivism in *fa'a Samoa* (culture and traditions of Samoa). This evolution has been identified and described as the 'changing Samoan self'. Traditional approaches of counselling employed by ministers in the past must adjust to align with the changes faced by church members today. This thesis presents the voices of 34 Samoan participants living in Samoa that include ministers, minister's wives, *matai* (title-holders), New-Zealand born Samoans, church members, and service users of a domestic violence agency. Participants shared their expectations of being counselled as well as counselling others, together with reflections concerning effective and ineffective counselling practices. A Samoan research methodological framework called *Tafatolu* (three-sides) has been conceptualised and used herein as the methodology for this project. *Tafatolu* methodological framework involves the synthesis of three key parts that this project considers as valuable to any research—a 'contemporary academic' approach to research, a 'cultural' approach, and the 'self' that represents the researcher's perspectives and positioning within the project. Collectively, these three parts have assisted this project in the collection and analysis of data that have informed this study. The findings from this research have highlighted the emergence of a changing Samoan self and counselling practices that remain centred upon God. *Fetu'utu'una'i le vā*, (Navigating relational space) emerged as an applicable approach to pastoral counselling for Samoans today. The enforcement of *fetu'utu'una'i le vā* has evolved alongside a changing Samoan self, from the use of physical force, to verbal force, excommunication and punishment, to now include conversations through dialogue.

The findings from this research have forged a theoretical framework of pastoral counselling for Samoans, presented as a continuum of traditional and contemporary understandings. Recommendations from this research propose pastoral counselling practices that cater for both traditionalists and contemporary Samoans.

Dedications

Our lives as servants of God are dedicated to our Lord.

This work is in memory of our loved ones whom our Lord has called:

Papatiso Fa'aolaina Pala'amo aged 2 months (1974): my younger brother

Latai Pala'amo 47 years (1990): my mother

Norman Otele Pala'amo 26 years (2008): my youngest brother

Auola Fiu Tialino Samuela Gibbons 75 years (2008): my father-in-law

Rowena Ana Tua Pala'amo 29 years (2009): my younger sister

Faiupu Maggie Samuela Gibbons 78 years (2012): my mother-in-law

Your love, teachings, and visions preserve with us and have helped shape this project in many ways.

This work is dedicated to my father Fosi who risked his own life to save mine, from a drowning incident when I was 5 years old.

This work is dedicated to my best friend and soul mate, my wife Lemau, and to our sons Norman, Alex, and Jayden: the most supportive, patient, and loving family that any father could hope for.

Acknowledgements

'Aua ne'i ia te i matou, le Ali'i e, 'aua ne'i ia te i matou, a ia tuuina atu le viiga i lou suafa, ona o lou alofa ma lou fa'amaoni.

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness. (Psalm 115:1)

First and foremost thanksgiving is to our Lord God, who began and has evolved this journey to this point. *Fa'afetai tele le Atua ona o lou alofa ma lou fa'amaoni!* Several people have contributed to this journey that my family and I wish to thank and acknowledge. The metaphor of *aiga* (family) is used for this purpose. Specifically, three-fold *aiga* that have blessed this journey: *Aiga fa'a-le-a'oa'oga* Education family; *Aiga fa'a-le-lotu* Church family; *Aiga* Kinship family.

Fa'afetai tele to my *Aiga fa'a-le-a'oa'oga* Education family. I wish to thank Massey University in particular my supervisors who have journeyed alongside me throughout: my primary supervisor Associate Professor Mark Henrickson and co-supervisors Dr Lily George, and Dr Catherine Cook: you have all given me your time and wisdom over the course of this study and have moulded and shaped my way of thinking to new heights. Thank you so much. God bless! I wish to thank the Pasifika Directorate of Massey University: Associate Professor Koloamatangi and all the staff for hosting 9 writing retreats that I attended, and for the financial blessings received through the Massey University Pasifika Doctoral Scholarships in 2015 and 2016. I thank Reverend Dr Jione Havea who inspired the idea of researching pastoral counselling through Massey University. I thank Professor Sir Mason and Professor Arohia Durie, and Ben Taufua of the Pasifika Directorate for my initial conversations with Massey University while in

Samoa that began conceptualising this journey. I thank the Pacific academics and staff, and my fellow Pacific PhD students of Massey University for your encouragement and wisdom shared towards my project. I thank Nicci Salter, administrator for the School of Social Work, for your assistance throughout this journey. I thank St Francis retreat centre staff for hosting our writing retreats. I thank Pasifika Health and Social Services: Dr Fiva Fa'alau and the staff; as well as *Soul Talk New Zealand*: Sharyn Wilson, Lorelei Turney, and Penny Toalima, for the opportunities to work, learn, and to develop as a counsellor for our Pacific people. I thank my counselling supervisor Cabrini 'Ofa Makasiale for your wisdom and support shown through our sessions. I thank the Massey University School of Social Work Graduate Research Fund Trust for the scholarship awarded. I thank the Massey University Graduate Research School for the prize awarded for the *Three Minute Thesis* competition. I thank the Pacific Islands Polynesian Education Foundation for the Norman Kirk Memorial Trust scholarship awarded towards my studies. I thank my Samoan language proof-reader for your help, although I cannot name out of maintaining anonymity. I thank the two parish ministers who allowed recruitment from your congregations, the staff of Samoa Victim Support Group, and especially the 34 participants including the ministers, the wives of ministers, *matai*, parishioners, and service users of SVSG who contributed to this project: thank you for your courage, wisdom, and knowledge shared that have made this project possible. To maintain anonymity for all my participants I do not present any names. I acknowledge and thank the families of two participants from this research who have passed on since this project began.

Fa'afetai tele to my *Aiga fa'a-le-lotu* Church family. My family and I wish to thank *Ekalesia Fa'apotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa: Congregational Christian Church Samoa* for the scholarship awarded to fund this entire project. We thank the Elders Committee, the General Secretary and Treasurer of the church and the *Fono Tele*, ministers and wives and all the members of the worldwide church: through your love and service of God realised in your offerings, this journey has been possible. *Fa'afetai tele, fa'amanuia le Atua!* We thank *Matagaluega Aukilani ma le Pulega Waitemata, Matagaluega Sini (NSW) ma le Pulega Sini i Saute, fa'afetai tele, fa'amanuia le Atua!*

There are several parishes and individuals in Aotearoa New Zealand, Sydney, and Samoa who have made direct monetary and food donations towards this project from its birth, we thank you especially: Reverend Elder Utufua and Taiaopo Naseri and EFKS Apia, Reverend Fuatai and Siloma Misaita and EFKS Favona, Reverend Iosefa and Lagi Rimoni and EFKS Glenfield, Reverend Dr Peni and Sinatala Leota and EFKS Grey Lynn, Reverend Fetu and Fusi Pama and EFKS Kingsland, Reverend Uikirifi and Shirley Vaifale and EFKS Rooty Hill, Reverend Elder Lucky and Terri Slade and EFKS Te Atatu, Reverend Dr Eletise and Rosa Suluvale and EFKS Toamua, Reverend Tautiaga and Tina Mamea and EFKS Ueligitone, Reverend Vagatai and Lusua Va'aelua and EFKS Westmere, Reverend Togafiti and Masae Tuaoimaalii and EFKS Mt Eden, Reverend Litala and Levei Tuimauualuga and EFKS Prestons, Reverend Pasefika and Talalelei Maiava and EFKS Mascot, Reverend Elder Aufaga and Sina Fa'afia, retired Reverend Elder Ioritana and Dr Lonise Tanielu, retired Reverend Elder Risatisone & Fereni Ete, Reverend Sesera and Litara Tolova'a, Reverend Elder Tumama and Elisapeta Vili, Pastor Koko and *Faletua*, Reverend To'omalatai and *Faletua* and Metotisi Penrith, Reverend Visesio and Angharad Saga, Reverend Steve and Ane Tema, retired Reverend Professor Otele and

Julie Perelini, retired Reverend Elder Kerisiano and Laumata Soti, Reverend Elder Kolia and So'otuli Kolia, *Ia fa'amanuia tele le Atua!* We thank Malua Theological College, the Principal Reverend Ma'afala & Lalokava Limā, Vice-Principal Reverend Alesana & Rita Eteuati, Faculty members and wives, and the student body for all your donations, prayers, and best wishes while we had embarked upon this journey. We also thank and acknowledge the former Principal of Malua Reverend Dr Afereti & Samata Uili who believed in my academic advancement towards doctoral studies. *Fa'afetai tele* for all your love and prayers. To our home parish while studying in Auckland, Reverend Elder Fiatepa & Penina Fa'a'e'e and EFKS North Shore, as well as in Sydney Reverend Elder Taeipo and Sitaua Malifa and EFKS Sydney, *o aiga lotu uma lava, fa'afetai tele le alolofa mo matou. O le ā misia outou. Fa'amanuia le Atua!*

Aligning with Samoan tradition as done so here, we thank others first before our own. For all our Uncles and Aunties and cousins in Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane, Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, Dubai, France, and Samoa, we thank you all so much for your ongoing prayers and support, food and monetary donations, particularly when we crossed paths while on this journey. To know that we have a loving and supportive family behind us while on this journey is a great blessing. A special thank you to our Terry St family—Marcus and Kura, AJ, Jason, and Moana, Phil, Afi, and your families, for hosting us at the start and towards the end of this journey. Thank you also to Va'aelua and Emma, Fa'amanū, Taloolevavau and Fa'afetai and family, for also welcoming us into your home at the start and towards the end of this project. We especially thank you Mum and Nana Falepau, my sister-in-law Maggie and Jackson and your children, my sister-in-law Upu and Rob, my brother-in-law Motu and

Ramona, and my nephews and nieces Talei, Déjà, Riley, Fiu, and Mia; to Dad and Grandpa Sei, *fa'afetai tele* for your financial support, love and continuous prayers. We especially thank you Dad and Grandpa retired Reverend Elder Fosi and Nana Pesi, my older sister Salamaina, my brother Fosi Junior and Hennessey, and my nephews Sean and James. We love you and thank you to all our *aiga* for the love you endlessly give, the blessings you extend to us, the financial help when we needed it most, your prayers, phone calls, emails, text messages, facebook and whatsapp messages of support and best wishes, *fa'afetai, fa'afetai tele lava! Fa'amanuia le Atua i le tatou aiga!*

This doctoral journey has been a collective effort from the start. A specific mention of thanking my wife Lemau and our sons Norman, Alex, and Jayden is not needed, as the sentiments of gratitude presented here are made on our behalf.

Via le Atua! Praise God!

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Glossary

<i>aiga</i>	family
<i>alofa</i>	love
<i>amana'ia</i>	to be acknowledged
<i>e sui faiga ae tumau fa'avae</i>	practices change yet foundations remain
<i>EFKS</i>	Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa
<i>EFKS</i>	CCCS: Congregational Christian Church Samoa
<i>fa'aaloalo</i>	respect
<i>fa'aSamoa</i>	culture and traditions of Samoa; Samoan way of life
<i>faiifeau/ fa'afeagaiga/ —fa'afeagaiga taulagi</i>	minister
<i>fale tele</i>	family meeting house, Samoan open house
<i>faletua</i>	minister's wife
<i>faufautua</i>	advice-giving
<i>fetu'utu'una'i le vā</i>	navigating relational space
<i>fetu'utu'una'i muniao</i>	manoeuvring a fisher's rod
<i>fetufa'aiga</i>	sharing perspectives; pastoral counselling
<i>fono</i>	meeting
<i>Fono tele</i>	Annual General Assembly
<i>i'omata</i>	apple of the eye
<i>ie lavalava</i>	sarong-like wraparound
<i>lē amana'ia</i>	not to be acknowledged
<i>lotu afiafi</i>	evening devotion
<i>matai</i>	title-holder
<i>matai alii</i>	chiefly title-holder
<i>moana</i>	ocean
<i>palagi</i>	Westerner
<i>talanoa</i>	talk; discuss
<i>tama'ita'i</i>	woman; eldest female sibling
<i>tapu</i>	sacred
<i>tele</i>	many

<i>telē</i>	major
<i>tōfā fetu'utu'una'i</i>	reflective wisdom
<i>tōfā mamao</i>	critical wisdom
<i>tulafale</i>	oratory title-holder
<i>vā</i>	relational space between people
<i>vā fealoaloa'i</i>	relationships
<i>va'aalo</i>	bonito canoe

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Prologue

(Three Minute thesis speech titled “God, Pastors, Counselling” by the author delivered at the ‘Three Minute thesis speech competition 2014’)¹

There was a time in Samoa when the church minister, or pastor, was the first person you contacted when you had problems. Issues with one’s spouse or partner, domestic violence, drugs and alcohol issues; the minister often was your ‘go-to’ person for these issues because people often believed that what the minister said was the God-given truth.

But that was then; for many Samoans today, what the minister says to go and do is not enough for the people to obey. Why? Because the Samoan person is changing rapidly in many ways.

Some of us here may understand this. You build up enough courage to talk to someone concerning your problems, but then afterwards, you are left feeling more confused. My PhD research looks at what the Samoan person has changed from, where he or she is changing to, and how will knowing these changes shape a revised way of counselling done by ministers today.

Finding a Samoan word for counselling was a challenge, because there is no such word in our language. There are words that suggest advising, but counselling is much more than that.

A Samoan proverb: ‘manoeuvring a fisher’s rod’, comes close to what counselling should be today. It refers to the traditional Samoan canoe fishing for the bonito fish. The fisher in the middle steers the canoe to where the fish are; the fisher at the rear manoeuvres the rod. When a fish takes the hook, the fisher yanks it out of the sea yelling, ‘here comes the fish’ and the middle fisher must steady the canoe so that the fish lands into the canoe, in front of him. Success. Counselling today by ministers should be like this. The minister

¹ This national and international speech competition required speakers to explain their doctoral research within three minutes.

manoeuvres during the counselling encounter, while the minister's wife, steadies and directs where the process goes. Sometimes this is the case, but mostly, the minister acts alone in a two-person canoe.

For my research I interviewed church ministers, church members who went to their minister for counselling, and those who chose not to but sought counselling through agencies in Samoa. I discovered that those who went to agencies, rather than their minister for counselling, wanted justice. Going to the agency led to the bad person being locked away. For those who sought counselling with their minister, they saw him as being God's representative on earth. Going to the minister, for them, was like taking their problems to God. It gave them spiritual healing.

So, wouldn't it be great if I could devise a counselling tool for ministers that is social, brings justice, as well as being of God, and gives spiritual healing? A tool that draws people to come and talk to their pastor.

This tool may be Samoan in design, but it is also useful for many others who have navigated their way through different oceans, and made places like Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia, their homes.

Winning speech of the Massey University Three Minute thesis competition, 2014
Represented Massey University at the Trans-Tasman Three Minute thesis finals, 2014²

² The Trans-Tasman Three Minute Thesis Finals in 2014 was held at the University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia.