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American Samoa Politics: Performing SĀMOA

Dayonara S. Gaoteote

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AMERICAN SAMOA POLITICS: PERFORMING SĀMOA

By

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Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Reno
2018

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts - Journalism and Media Studies

Hank Greenspun School of Journalism and Media Studies
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs
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Abstract

American Samoa as a self-governing U.S. territory located in the South Pacific is fortunate to be able to maintain their cultural traditions, language, and lands in all aspects- including their government. However, when the community suffers from a number of growing issues that affect the health and safety of its citizens, an analysis of the culture and leadership is fitting. I interviewed Jacqueline Tuiasosopo-Mata'u, Dr. Tapa'au Daniel Aga, and Chief Tauaisafune Niualama Taifane to gain insight into American Samoa government history, American Samoa government and community in the present, and to describe cultural practices and traditions that are in place. In critically analyzing the insight gained from these interviews, I discussed the Tā-Vā Theory of Reality and the Samoan concept of “teu le vā,” nurturing relationships, with Dr. Tevita Ka’ili. While American Samoa’s frustration with their government leaders is warranted, I found that the issues stem from the entire American Samoa community’s unspoken understanding of culture and its demonstration. Both leaders and citizens, and in spaces beyond the government, American Samoa values superficial peace and positional power over dealing with the actual issues.

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Introduction

The freedom that American Samoa has to self-govern has led to a fusion between culture and politics in government and leadership. Since April 17, 1900, American Samoa has been recognized as an official territory of the United States (*American Samoa*, n.d.). Despite ultimately belonging to the U.S., American Samoa government, the *fono*, operates independently with Samoan cultural values in place and their residents electing their government officials (*American Samoa*, n.d.). As a result of this independence, American Samoa's government elected officials operationalize cultural values in their leadership roles, nurture their relationship with the indigenous community according to those cultural values, and govern the American Samoan islands in a way that adheres to those cultural values. While any democracy or republic attempts to cater to the general population, American Samoa presents a unique position as a U.S. territory with its indigenous people voting to elect their representatives according to indigenous culture.

In its unique position, American Samoa operationalizes relational and social space adhering to the Samoan concept and value, *teu le vā*. *Teu le vā* translates to "care for the space." Care operates as a verb and the space, in this relational context, refers to the figurative space between people in a relationship.

The figurative *vā* in *teu le vā* is a concept that is a part of the Tā-Vā Theory of Reality, an indigenous moana theory about the practice and understanding of time and space in Pacific Islander cultures (Ka'ili et al., 2017). The Tā-Vā Theory of Reality is the idea that Pacific Islanders move toward the future by facing the past, in the present (Ka'ili et al., 2017). The *vā* in present-time relationships and culture is negotiated and understood according to the past. This Pacific negotiation according to the past contrasts from the western understanding of time and space, which place past, present, and future in a linear design. Tā is the Tongan word for time

and *vā* is the Tongan word for space (Ka'ili, Māhina, & Addo, 2017). In Polynesian culture, time is a verb and space is a noun; time is a marker of space and the two concepts are inseparable (Ka'ili, Māhina, & Addo, 2017). This concept of time and space is applicable to all parts of the culture including physical land and environment, music and chants, storytelling, community relationships, and in traditional practices (Ka'ili, Māhina, & Addo, 2017). This extends to digital space and the possibility of sociospatial ties and connecting in a digital diaspora (Burroughs & Ka'ili, 2015).

Since the *vā* in present-time relationships are negotiated based on the past, it is interesting to note what that means for American Samoa government. Politicians in the U.S. focus their campaigns on a better future and changes they hope to implement if they are elected. The past, if and when discussed, are usually to make a statement about one's character or to explain an event that the politician is being questioned about by the public. However, reality being oriented facing the past means a different position, purpose, campaign, and way of governing for American Samoa politicians.

Considering the Tā-Vā Theory of Reality and the value placed on relationships, or the concept of *vā*, in Samoan culture, this creative thesis project will explore and analyze American Samoa leadership in relation to cultural values, between long-standing, generational relationships, and to the current people with current events. The exploration of American Samoa leadership will result in a multi-episode podcast that will cover American Samoa government history; Samoan language in leadership; “political correctness” in Samoan culture; and discuss the state of the present American Samoa government in relation to the Tā-Vā Theory of Reality. The podcast will illustrate how American Samoa goes about government and leadership

according to the culture, and work to identify the strengths and weaknesses that currently exist with the use and understanding of that cultural administrative government space.

The podcast will include four episodes, the first being “American Samoa Government History.” The chief system, *fa’a matai*, which is the traditional organization of leadership among families and villages, is the cultural system that is applied to the general government of American Samoa as a U.S. territory (Cultural Atlas, n.d.). The *fa’a matai* is such a valuable and intricate part of the culture’s organization that the Samoan culture has what is called a *fa’alupega*, a poetic account of each village’s families’ chief titles (Akeli, 2013). The *fa’alupega* is cited at important ceremonies, gets passed down through generations, and can now be found in published books (Akeli, 2013). The *fa’alupega* is ultimately a tribute that honors the traditional system of chiefs and titles, highlighting just how sacred those systems of relationships are—relationships between the village and familial titles, between families within a village, and between each village. Thus, the first episode will go into detail on how the integration of the *matai* system in American Samoa government came to be. The history will begin from what the government looked like when it first became a territory, discuss leadership and movements that occurred to implement a more cultural system into the government, and begin to take a critical look at how that cultural system may be deemed outdated in American Samoa government today. This first episode will serve as an introductory episode that will lay the groundwork for understanding and building the thesis.

After the episode on history, the second episode will be “Samoan Language in American Samoa Government.” The ability to speak Samoan and have good oratorship in Samoan culture is highly valued. There are two kinds of chiefs in the *matai* system, the *ali’i*, considered the decision-making chiefs, and the *tulafale*, the talking chief (Cultural Atlas, n.d.). There is

something to be said about the value of language and oratorship in Samoan culture, if within even the most traditional and sacred system of leadership, Samoans have decided to have a unique position for a talking chief. So, this second episode will critically analyze language as a value in Samoan culture and analyze a speech from an American Samoa government official for key cultural themes.

Following the episode on Samoan language, will be “‘Political Correctness’ in American Samoa.” Stephen Morris (2001) describes an aspect of political correctness to be the following: “because certain statements will lead listeners to make adverse inferences about the type of the speaker, speakers have an incentive to alter what they say to avoid that inference.” Generally, this idea of political correctness has to do with the presentation of oneself in a way that will be viewed as acceptable by society, or the audience in a specific context. Beginning with some of the themes highlighted in the second episode on language through the analyzed speech, this episode will take a closer look at the overall presentation of a candidate for governor’s campaign and consider what American Samoa considers to be “politically correct.” The goal here is to identify ways in which culture and leadership are interwoven in society and how what may be considered “politically correct” is or is not beneficial to the wellbeing of the community.

The fourth and final episode will be “Samoan Culture: *Tā-Vā Theory of Reality*” and it will focus on tying all of the elements together with an emphasis on the philosophical theory. Since the Tā-Vā Theory of Reality is a theory about how Pacific Islander cultures conceptualize time and space, an episode focused on defining the theory and applying the theory would be a great episode to conclude the podcast. The creative thesis project is built on an aspect of the theory with the concept of *teu le vā*, because of the honoring of relationships and the *matai* system through time in American Samoa government. This concluding episode will speak to the

purpose of the podcast and analysis, and discuss the possibilities for the future of American Samoa.

Purpose and Historical Significance of the Study

The connected community and governance of American Samoa by its own Samoan citizens was a privilege that had to be negotiated, and for that reason, American Samoa's elected government officials and citizens should seriously consider the effects of operationalizing culture in their government and community. When the United States flag was first raised in American Samoa, it acknowledged Commander Benjamin Franklin Tilley as the U.S. Naval Governor of American Samoa (Shaffer, 2000). The *fono's* legislative position today was originally an advisory position, until 1932 when High Talking Chief Tuiasosopo Mariota I, also known as the "father of the modern *fono*" pursued a real legislature for the U.S. territory (Shaffer, 2000; Amerika Samoa Humanities Council, 2018). HTC Tuiasosopo I recognized that an advisory position and holding meetings with the appointed governor was "only to keep the chiefs happy." The right for American Samoans to govern themselves stemmed from the desire to preserve culture and defend their people (Shaffer, 2000). Therefore, a government of American Samoa by its own Samoan citizens should be most beneficial to the community.

This fidelity Samoans have to Samoan culture and language, to be able to upkeep traditions and values for generations, is an admirable quality until the lack of flexibility fails to recognize problems within the community. While the American Samoan islands can currently celebrate zero cases of COVID-19 and the likelihood of remaining untouched by the virus due to the islands' being shut down to both incoming and outgoing travelers, American Samoa has a great number of problems to deal with on its own. To name a few of those problems, currently in the islands are a rise in the number of teen and young adult suicides, a drug epidemic, an understaffed and under-equipped hospital, and undersupplied schools. These problems are not new to American Samoa. These problems are a result of a lack of full acknowledgement of what

the community needs. These community needs are kept from being met by the strict adherence to traditional cultural operations by American Samoa government and community as a whole.

The increase in community problems and lack of solutions in American Samoa is best exemplified by the lack of care and complete disregard for the school system. In 2018, it was discovered that students and teachers were fundraising for school supplies due to the lack of funding from the government (Fausia, 2018). In addition to that, there was a lack of school buses to help transport the children to and from school (Fausia, 2018). Both problems stem from what seems to be a lack of clear communication and clear understanding of funding for the Department of Education between the government, the Board of Education, and the teachers and students in schools (Fausia, 2018). In September of 2020, upon dropping her child off to Tafuna Elementary School, a mother discovered broken chairs and desks that were not safe for the children (Samoa News staff, 2020). Students are sitting on floors and a site visit to multiple schools have proven the overall undersupplied state of the school system in American Samoa when it comes to classroom equipment and technology (Samoa News staff, 2020). Again there was an issue with communication and funding when it came to ordered school supplies not being processed and in addition to that, a delay on compensation for teachers that worked through workshops over the summer (Sagapolutele, 2020). The issue with the lack of supplies in schools that was raised in 2018 has not improved and in fact, has possibly gotten worse since. The lack of clear understanding and communication between the government, the Board of Education, the faculty and staff of schools, and between the individuals within each group are a result of bigger issues within government leadership. The fact that the problem has only gotten worse in two years is an indication of the disregard for the school system by leaders in government and the

lack of understanding and communication is a sign that not everyone is on the same page when it comes to improving the overall wellbeing and quality of the community.

While the issues themselves may not be unique to American Samoa, the depth and gravity of these issues are significant, because of cultural and community closeness. American Samoa has a population of 55,519 people spanning a total land area of 76.2 square miles across five islands and two atolls (Amerika Samoa Humanities Council, 2018). To help further illustrate the smallness of the island, in 2017, there were only two traffic fatalities and in 2018, there was only one traffic fatality; all three caused by "drowsy driving" (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 2019). The survival of the Samoan culture, the value placed on relationships, the concept *teu le vā*, and the figurative closeness are a result of the literal, physical closeness of the community. Therefore, issues in American Samoa are easily perceived and quickly widespread. The space of *teu le vā* is a "contact zone" where local and global articulations of Samoan culture converge (Fermantez, 2007; Walker, 2012; Burroughs & Burroughs, 2014).

Yet, despite the widespread awareness of the reality of these issues, American Samoa government and leadership continue to operate without change. The cultural focus on the past, keeps people from fully acknowledging and engaging with a present that requires urgent attention in order to have a promising future. The nurturing of relationships in a politician's campaign and when an official is elected, is a form of political correctness in Samoan culture that is hurting American Samoa's community, especially the present and upcoming youth. The preservation of culture, language, tradition, and values is a commendable and exciting thing that should be celebrated. However, when the strict adherence to that culture causes the community more harm than good, it is time to address cultural weaknesses. In addition to cultural effects on its own community, American Samoa government being run by Samoans is a privilege that

should be revered with honor and a duty handled responsibly so that it may be a privilege kept for generations to come.

Creative Thesis Approach

Overview

A podcast for the thesis project is the appropriate deliverable for the thesis topic, because the episodes will be conversations that need to be had in the Samoan community. To thoroughly explore the topic of culture and leadership in American Samoa, dialogue and conversation should take place with guests for a quality discussion. In addition to the importance of dialogue, Samoans are a storytelling people that value speeches and speaking- audible conversation for this project is appropriate as it will build understanding, discussion, and will be the most accessible/distributable to the Samoan community. While the intended audience for my podcast are American Samoa nationals and those of like-mind that care about the islands, the podcast will be presented as an informative piece that will provide background information on American Samoa and Samoan culture for a general audience. The media form of the podcast provides a space for connecting as a tool for public pedagogy, a kind of digital ritual engagement (Burroughs, 2013; Burroughs & Ka'ili, 2015).

While not final, the current title being considered for the podcast is: *Governing American Samoa*. The podcast will consist of four episodes that will each be 25-30 minutes long and the format will be a discussion-based conversation with guests on each episode. The following sections will discuss equipment and production, guests being considered, episode topics, key questions/points of conversation, episode planning, and an overall podcast timeline.

Equipment and Production

Each interview will take place in the Journalism & Media Studies Podcast Studio located inside the Greenspun Hall Media Facility. Studio scheduling will be coordinated through Dr. Nourse and the guest(s). Due to COVID-19 restrictions, spacing issues and other health-related considerations, some of the interviews may be conducted partially in studio and partially online via a video-conferencing application such as Zoom or Google Meets.

The Greenspun Hall Media Facility utilizes the Adobe Creative Cloud suite of applications. The digital audio editing program built into the Creative Cloud suite is Adobe Audition. Audition is an industry standard professional audio editing and manipulation program and is utilized by podcasters, recording engineers, and other audio professionals around the world.

Industry standard practices dictate that after interviews are completed, they will be transcribed for coding and/or other quick-referencing consultation. Following the transcription of the interviews, the incorporation of selected segments of the interviews can be positioned into a narration/script.

Recording of the narration/script along with editing of the narration, interviews, and the incorporation of any additional audio clips will be done via Adobe Audition. Multitrack editing will be utilized for the incorporation/layering of any desired music and/or sound effects. Postprocessing will ensure the loudness of the interview segments along with narration and any other selected audio are all within acceptable volume (loudness) parameters for the end user.

Audio files will be exported as MPEG-2 Audio Layer III (MP3) files. Files will be uploaded to Apple Podcasts (iTunes) and/or Spotify Podcasts where they can be accessed by committee members and others who may be interested in this podcast topic.

Podcast Guests

Please note that the interview consent and release form can be found at the end of this prospectus document.

- Jacqueline Tuiasosopo: The granddaughter of HTC Tuiasosopo Mariota I is knowledgeable on HTC Tuiasosopo Mariota I's family background and cultural history.
- Rev. Ailao Tofaeono, Rev. Mika Kelemete, Rev. Matapo'o Peniamina: Church pastors are highly revered in the Samoan community and are viewed as a well of knowledge when it comes to Samoan culture and language. They may be able to provide insight on different cultural aspects being discussed in different episodes. However, if they are unavailable, they will definitely be able to point me to someone who may be interested as they are very connected members of the Samoan community as well.
- Oilau Lutali: Oilau Lutali is the granddaughter of the late A.P. Lutali, who served two terms as governor of American Samoa and is also the granddaughter of Dr. Afoa Lutu, a well-established attorney in American Samoa. Oilau was raised in American Samoa and remains connected to the U.S. territory. Her upbringing, connection, and thoughts on the current state of American Samoa and how the government operates will be valuable to gaining the perspective of a current young adult and what they view as the strengths and weaknesses of the territory.
- Dr. Tēvita O. Ka'ili, Dr. 'Ōkusitino Māhina: They developed the Tā-Vā Theory of Reality, the philosophical theory that this creative thesis project is applying to analyze American Samoa government. Their input on the overall analysis of American Samoa government, and exploration and explanation of the Tā-Vā Theory of Reality would be most insightful.

- Lemanu Mauga and/or Talauega Ale: Lemanu and Talauega campaigned for Governor and Lieutenant Governor, and won the 2020 election by a landslide. Their insight on campaigning, their understanding of government and culture, and their plans for the community would be valuable to understanding American Samoa government today and the path they want to see and plan to put American Samoa on.

Episode Topics and Points of Conversation

Episode No. 1 Topic: American Samoa Government History

Questions, Points, and Timeline of Conversation:

- 8 Minutes: Introduce the project purpose and thesis.
 - Frame the issue by describing the state of American Samoa today. Discuss the drug epidemic, the understaffed and under-equipped hospital, the under-equipped schools, community preparedness when it comes to disasters, and the borders' shutdown due to COVID-19. The rise of these issues should cause American Samoans to critically look at their government and leadership. What is being done to help the community? Why is there a lack of change for a community so close and integrated?
- 1 Minute: Introduce my guest(s).
- 8 Minutes: Detail the history of American Samoa Government.
 - When American Samoa became a territory, what did its government and leadership system look like?
 - Discuss HTC Tuiasosopo Mariota I and his role in founding the *fono*. Why did he fight for American Samoa to govern themselves? What exactly did he fight for- the Samoan chief (*matai*) system to be in place? An analysis of his intentions and goals in the beginning of trying to get American Samoa to have an independent government will be telling of the purpose and values with which the current territory's government was founded upon. The process he applied to pursue the modern *fono* may also highlight some key cultural points and values.

- What was the significance of keeping the matai system intact for governing American Samoa?
- 8 Minutes: Bring the conversation back to what American Samoa government and leadership look like today.
 - What parts of the matai system are still in place in American Samoa government today? Are government officials required to hold matai titles to serve in government? If so, why? Discuss cultural status as a value.
 - What other cultural/traditional aspects are implemented in the government and affects its operations?
- 5 Minutes: Conclusion. Make final thoughts and comments on the kind of social structure and system that is in place in American Samoa, based on the conversation just had about American Samoa government and the matai system working together.

Episode No. 2 Topic: Samoan Language in American Samoa Government

Questions, Points, and Timeline of Conversation:

- 5 Minutes: Introduce this episode by briefly explaining what was discussed in the last episode. Discuss the matai system in American Samoa government and the social structure in American Samoa. Introduce this episode's podcast topic: Samoan language in American Samoa government.
- 1 Minute: Introduce my guest(s).
- 7 Minutes: Discuss the importance of paying attention to Samoan language when it comes to leadership.
 - Briefly describe the difference between conversational Samoan and formal Samoan, and how formal Samoan comes with a different level of respect (people carrying themselves differently in spaces where formal Samoan is spoken; there is a higher standard).
 - Samoan culture highly values good orators. Does this value mean a good speech can trump a lack of follow-through in action?
- 8 Minutes: Listen to an American Samoa Government leader's speech.
 - Analyze the speech and pull out key themes. What is this person saying? What does it mean in the bigger scheme of things?
 - Based on the thing being said by this leader, what does it say about American Samoa government? What does it tell us about what their citizens are listening to or listening for, when it comes to their leaders?
 - How does this speech differ from speeches given by government officials in the U.S.?

- 6 Minutes: Conclusion. Discuss final thoughts on Samoan language in government, how it contributes to cultural leadership space, and what it says about the Samoan community.

Episode No. 3 Topic: “Political Correctness” in American Samoa

Questions, Points, and Timeline of Conversation:

- 5 Minutes: Introduce the episode by discussing how the last episode on Samoan language in government was a good precursor to this episode on discussing politics as understood by American Samoans. This episode will explore what is considered to be politically correct in American Samoa and the episode on language was a good starting point for this concept, because the analyzed speech would have pointed out key themes in culture and communication. Exploring what “political correctness” looks like in American Samoa will help build understanding as to how and why the government continues to operate as it does.
- 1 Minute: Introduce my guest(s).
- 10 Minutes: Analyze and discuss political campaigns.
 - What does a campaign look like?
 - What are candidates saying? What are their words honoring? What are they promising?
 - What are candidates doing? Discuss debates versus waves.
 - The small islands are well-connected. Discuss a “popularity contest” aspect. Discuss a cultural emphasis on honoring relationships (it is about *who* you know... not *what* you know?) and how that plays out when it comes to political campaigns and personal relationships.
- 9 Minutes: Conclusion. Summarize and explain final thoughts on campaigning in American Samoa. An analysis of what a campaign in American Samoa looks like will illustrate what is considered to be “politically correct” and socially accepted by its

people. This analysis can help explain weaknesses in government, because campaign strategies and promises can be compared to actual government operations, and a distinction between what is promised and what is actualized can be clearly identified.

Episode No. 4 Topic: Samoan Culture: Tā-Vā Theory of Reality

Questions, Points, and Timeline of Conversation:

- 8 Minutes: Introduce this final episode topic: a discussion on the Tā-Vā Philosophical Theory of Reality. Define it, describe it, and give personal examples of my way to understanding it.
- 1 Minute: Introduce my guest(s).
- 8 Minutes: Take the time to talk about the concept of *teu le vā*.
 - This is an opportunity to tie together everything discussed in the first three episodes and highlight how old traditions may be antiquated when dealing with a new generation and a new set of issues.
 - Analyze the government and leadership space. How is *teu le vā* operationalized in American Samoa government? Who does it prioritize and who does it leave out?
- 8 Minutes: Conclusion. Reiterate the thesis and project goals. Sum up analysis, discuss hopes and possibilities for the future of American Samoa government, and highlight strengths of Samoan leadership and culture as well.

Potential/Expected Results/Discussion

The goal of the podcast miniseries is to have a discussion on cultural values and traditions, based on the culture's adherence to the concept *teu le vā*, and identify the strengths, weaknesses, and areas that require change in American Samoa leadership so that issues that arise may not grow as quickly or widespread in the community. The discussions that will make up the podcast will answer the following questions:

- Who is left out of the vā? Who does it fail to consider?
- What does the vā between administration and community look like? How is it illustrated in a campaign? How is it carried out when in office?
- What in campaign language use and operations cater to this vā?
- What kind of social structure does adhering to *teu le vā* build?

Future Research/Contribution

My hope for this project is that it is the beginning of a conversation that can lead to real change. The purpose of this project is to begin to analyze the ways in which culture and leadership in American Samoa government is both strong and weak. By recognizing where culture in leadership fails to acknowledge the issues of the current community and does not encourage positive change, we are able to identify the problem and begin to find ways to solve the problem. Before getting to real change, there is more to uncover, understand, and analyze about the culture and community. The beginning of the process to continue the conversation would be to make the podcast available for American Samoans themselves through platforms like social media. I would like to continue the conversation with the people of American Samoa and eventually begin to initiate the conversation with American Samoa government officials.

Project Timeline

December 2020	<p>Present my prospectus.</p> <p>Reach out to potential guests. Explain my project and my goals- initiate the conversation and invite them to be a guest on an episode (or multiple episodes if they so choose to).</p> <p>Work with the guests and chairpersons on scheduling the podcast recordings.</p> <p>Begin conducting interviews.</p>
January 2021	<p>Begin looking for audio clips that I will want to use for the podcast.</p> <p>Complete interviews.</p> <p>Have the first episode recorded by Jan. 25.</p>
February 2021	<p>Have the second episode recorded by Feb. 8.</p> <p>Have the third episode recorded by Feb. 22.</p>
March 2021	<p>Have the fourth episode recorded by March 8.</p>
April 2021	<p>Have a rough cut of the podcast by March 15.</p> <p>Have the final cut of the podcast by March 22.</p> <p>Defend my creative thesis project to the committee by March 29.</p> <p>Submit creative thesis project and materials by April 12.</p>

Reflection

For the same reasons that High Orator Chief Mariota Tuiasosopo I lobbied to both American Samoans and U.S. citizens for Samoan culture in American Samoa government, I pursued this thesis. It is an incredible privilege to be able to still speak the Samoan language, keep our lands, and see Samoan traditions still in practice in the islands today- while maintaining a relationship with the U.S. Tuiasosopo lobbied for American Samoa's self-government so that American Samoa would not suffer at the hands of outsiders. Therefore, it is upsetting that a suffering American Samoa is suffering at the hands of its own people. The fact is that all we have is each other. Our tiny group of islands in the South Pacific not being pictured on every map is symbolic of that. So when American Samoa leadership cannot manage its population of 55,000, what does that say? What could that mean for the privilege we have to self-govern?

Keeping SĀMOA in American Samoa

In the first episode, I lay the foundation for the thesis by detailing the history of American Samoa government, describing the issues in American Samoa today, and defining the tā-vā theory and the concept of "teu le vā." Mrs. Mata'u describing the journey that it took for Tuiasosopo to have culture incorporated into government operations was important, because it establishes that the incorporation of culture is supposed to be a good thing for the people. Tuiasosopo negotiated with both Samoans and the U.S. for years, because he wanted the Samoan people to be able to keep their lands, language, and culture without western influence and interference. Yet, the growing number of issues in American Samoa over the years are a sign of a flaw in the system. To begin an attempt at identifying the flaw in American Samoa government, Dr. Tapa'au, Chief Tauaisafune, and Mrs. Mata'u describe the Samoan cultural aspect in government- the matai system. To break it down further, Dr. Ka'ili defines the tā-vā theory so

that I can begin to make connections between this cultural idea of nurturing relationships, *teu le vā*, and the American Samoa government.

Defining SĀMOA in American Samoa

After establishing American Samoa government's history, in the second episode I explore American Samoa government and community in the present. Chief Tauaisafune describes the different parts to a speech and Dr. Tapa'au describes campaigning as a political candidate. After discussing these two important aspects to the government, I was able to identify the way that “*teu le vā*” was operating and that was to ultimately superficially, maintain a good reputation and maintain good relationships. Dr. Ka'ili explained that each person has a different hierarchy when it comes to their relationships. Cultural demonstrations were statements to display that they valued culture, but there were different levels and priorities when it came to each person's idea of “*teu le vā*.” While the issue is that everyone campaigns and votes according to their relationships, the bigger issue is the overall understanding and consensus that the community has on what the different Samoan values mean and how they should be carried out.

In my conversations with Mrs. Mata'u, Dr. Tapa'au, and Chief Tauaisafune, the concepts “*teu le vā*” and respect were inseparable. “*Teu le vā*” could not be discussed without explaining the importance of respect in Samoan culture. In realizing and reflecting upon this detail, I realized that the concept of respect in the Samoan culture has justified and perpetuated cycles that has allowed American Samoa government to continue without change and the community to spiral further into its suffering state. Therefore, I focused the third episode on highlighting the concept of respect, making connections between respect and *teu le vā*, and I discuss the future of American Samoa.

RE-defining SĀMOA in American Samoa

In the final episode, I start with the discussion of reprioritizing the vā. Dr. Ka'ili suggested that on a bigger scale, there needs to be a conversation that connects everyone back together to one ancestor. He suggests that it is a start to getting American Samoa to see that we need to care about everyone. If American Samoa can view each other as family, the work to adjust government operations so that everyone can benefit, can begin.

After discussing Dr. Ka'ili's suggestion for change in government, I then get into discussing respect as a value in Samoan culture. Based on the way respect was described in my conversations with Mrs. Mata'u and Chief Tauaisafune, I realized that the idea of respect as a cultural value was extreme and destructive, and that it affected a lot more than the government and leadership of American Samoa. So I took the time to define it and explain its significance and impact.

While highlighting the issues in my analysis is important, it was also important to provide another perspective to create a fuller picture. My conversation with Dr. Tapa'au brought to light things I did not consider. For example, climate change is an issue that I failed to acknowledge for the beautiful islands. As leaders of a self-governing territory, nurturing the land is also an important form of "teu le vā." In addition to this, American Samoa's small population in some instances doubles as a limiting factor. Dr. Tapa'au that there are not enough qualified candidates for essential work.

After considering Dr. Tapa'au's perspective, it was important for me to conclude the podcast on a positive note. The purpose of this thesis was not to claim that Samoan culture should be removed from American Samoa government, but rather to point out areas that could be adjusted to better benefit the entire community. I hope that American Samoa can continue to

keep their lands, language, and practices- but in a way that is helpful and not harmful to the community.

Final Thoughts

By highlighting the ways the current application of Samoan culture in American Samoa government cripples the community, I was able to highlight areas that require change not just in government, but in overall cultural outlook. Getting to challenge the concept of respect as a Samoan value was not something I expected to do in the podcast, but it was necessary. The grandeur idea of respect prevented positive advancements and dialogue in any sphere- from the government, to the schools, within villages, and within families.

In reflecting upon the entire pre-production, production, and post-production process of the podcast, I enjoyed every part of it! I enjoyed planning and conducting the interviews, because I did not know what would come out of the different conversations that I was about to have. When I got to editing and putting pieces together, I was able to critically think through my conversations and listen closely to the information I had on my hands. So realizing the significance of respect and changing the episodes to highlight that was unexpected, but it felt like such a breakthrough for my thesis and the bigger picture of what I wanted to say. Condensing the original four episodes down to three was an important step in the refining and editing process. There is so much planning and paying attention to detail when in post-production, but it was satisfying seeing and hearing everything come together. I never worked on a podcast before, but always wanted to, and making it the deliverable for my thesis allows it to be something useful and accessible to other listeners- it was perfect.

Podcast Episode Summaries

Podcast Title: American Samoa Politics: Performing SĀMOA

Podcast Description: American Samoa as a self-governing U.S. territory located in the South Pacific is fortunate to be able to maintain their cultural traditions, language, and lands in all aspects- including their government. However, when the community suffers from a number of growing issues that affect the health and safety of its citizens, an analysis of the culture and leadership is fitting. With the help of Jacqueline Tuiasosopo-Mata'u, Dr. Tapa'au Daniel Aga, Chief Tauaisafune Niualama Taifane, and Dr. Tevita Ka'ili, I take a closer look at American Samoa's approach to governance and its incorporation of Samoan culture. | [Music](#) produced by Bradley Moon.

Episode #1 Title: Keeping SĀMOA in American Samoa

Episode #1 Description: The growing number of issues in American Samoa today are a direct result of the presence of Samoan culture in every sphere- especially the government. In this episode, Dr. Tapa'au, Chief Tauaisafune, and Mrs. Mata'u describe the original Samoan form of government, the matai system, and explain the importance and purpose of the journey taken by High Orator Chief Mariota Tuiasosopo I to keep culture in American Samoa government and Samoans in leadership positions. Dr. Ka'ili defines and introduces the Tā-Vā Philosophical Theory of Reality that I apply in my analysis of Samoan culture in American Samoa government, with a specific focus on the concept of "teu le vā." | [Music](#) produced by Bradley Moon.

Episode #2 Title: Defining SĀMOA in American Samoa

Episode #2 Description: The overall analysis of Samoan culture in American Samoa government involves identifying and defining the different cultural components that are at play. In this episode, Chief Tauaisafune describes the parts to a traditional Samoan speech and Dr. Tapa'au describes campaign culture and events. In making connections between cultural components and the concept of "teu le vā," Dr. Ka'ili further helps me illustrate and highlight the misapplication of the concept "teu le vā" in American Samoa government. | [Music](#) produced by Bradley Moon.

Episode #3 Title: RE-defining SĀMOA in American Samoa

Episode #3 Description: After identifying the ways in which "teu le vā" is misapplied in American Samoa politics, important analysis and discussion of the overall culture that perpetuates damaging and ineffective cycles is appropriate. This conversation includes further discussion of "teu le vā" and a direct challenge of the concept of respect in Samoan culture. In this episode, with the help of Dr. Kai'ili, Chief Tauaisafune, Mrs. Mata'u, and Dr. Tapa'au, I highlight potential areas for changes in American Samoa and discuss the importance of keeping Samoan culture in American Samoa. | [Music](#) produced by Bradley Moon.

Appendix: Consent & Release Form

TO: Dayonara Gaoteote (“THE PRODUCER”)

University of Nevada, Las Vegas (808-347-5740) (gaoted1@unlv.nevada.edu)

RE: Governing American Samoa (THE "PRODUCTION")

For good and valuable consideration, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, I, the undersigned, do hereby grant to Producer and its affiliated companies and licensees, the irrevocable right and license to use my name and biographical material, and the right to use any audio and/or visual recording, interview or photograph made by Producer of me (and of my home or business location if included in the recording or photograph) (the "Materials"), without additional compensation to me, for inclusion in the Production and in any advertising or publicity related thereto, which may be exploited in any and all media now or hereafter devised, to be determined at Producer's discretion, throughout the world, in perpetuity.

I further grant the Producer complete discretion in how it edits and uses the Materials in the Production, and I hereby waive any so-called "moral rights" in connection therewith and release Producer from any cause of action, liability, loss or damage of any nature whatsoever arising out of Producer's exercise of rights granted herein. I further hereby warrant that the rights I have granted herein and any material supplied by me will not violate the rights of any third party.

I understand that I shall not be entitled to compensation of any kind from the Producer, its licensees, successors and assigns, other than as may be specified herein.

I acknowledge and agree that ‘Producer’ may assign this release without restriction.

The terms of this Consent and Release shall be binding upon myself, my heirs, executors, legal personal representatives and assigns.

I execute this consent and release freely and voluntarily with full understanding of its contents. I declare that I am at least 18 years of age. I declare that I am not a member of SAG/ACTRA or any similar performer's union or guild.

SIGNATURE: _____

PRINT NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Parental Consent for Minors (if applicable)

I acknowledge having read the above release and I consent to its terms on behalf of my child.

PARENT'S/LEGAL GUARDIAN'S

SIGNATURE (if under age of 18): _____

PRINT NAME: _____

DATE: _____

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Curriculum Vitae

DAYONARA GAOTEOTE

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Objective

Journalism and Media Studies, M.A. graduate looking to build experience and enhance skills in counseling, collaboration, leadership, communications, and organization.

Experience

University of Nevada, Las Vegas: Graduate College
Graduate Assistant | Aug. 2019 - Present

- Assisted with facilitating professional development workshops and workshop correspondence
- Assisted with gathering workshop and event feedback via Qualtrics
- Assisted the Director of Communications with weekly student newsletter
- Assisted the Director of Communications with writing articles and student profiles for the UNLV News Center

Education

University of Nevada, Las Vegas: Journalism and Media Studies, M.A. | Aug. 2019 - May 2021
University of Nevada, Reno: Communication Studies, B.A. | Aug. 2015 - May 2018

Skills

- Interpersonal Skills
- Organizing for Professional Development Workshops and Events, Planning
- Communication Skills: Internal and External Correspondence
- Team-Project: Collaborating and Delegating
- Knowledgeable on Marketing Cloud, Salesforce, coding, and Qualtrics
- Knowledgeable on Microsoft Offices and Google Drive applications