

IN SEARCH OF MEANING, NUANCE AND METAPHOR IN SOCIAL POLICY

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Abstract

Searching for meaning, nuance and metaphor in cultural performance and ritual provides insight into psyche and ethos as well as a direction for the development of law and policy. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi invites us to make this search if we want better outcomes for Pacific young people and their families. Policy needs to be congruent with this world. The search requires insight into culture, language and history.

INTRODUCTION

My good friend Alex Frame and his colleague Paul Meredith, in a very interesting paper on “Performing Law: Muru and Hakari” (2001), define context for me. They suggest that searching for meaning, nuance and metaphor in cultural performance and ritual provides insight into psyche and ethos and, as well, a direction for the development of law and policy. Indeed, the search for meaning, nuance and metaphor requires insight into culture, language and history. Each is found in ritual and practice. Rituals and practices give context, context gives meaning and meaning gives insight.

I have now written three papers on nuance, meaning and metaphor, and together with others, they have been drawn upon for this address. These papers have led me on a merry chase through mythology, history, culture and, surprisingly, mental health, and now, social policy. In this paper I will revisit these themes.

CULTURE

Some years ago I was sorely tempted to take up an international post which would have meant that I had to leave Samoa. By chance I met in Apia one of the elders of my family, Gaopoa by name. At that time he was over 100 years in age. He grabbed my right arm, took it in both of his hands, and massaged it gently, as we say in Samoan, “lomi”. He looked into

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my eyes and said very slowly: “Tupua, tautuana mo oe le atunuu”. Roughly translated: “[Tupua] Bear in mind the land of our fathers”. I knew then I could not leave Samoa.

Gaopoa was recognised as our kaumātua. His wisdom bespoke divine blessing. He spoke for the past, the present and the future. I was in mental turmoil because I was trying to rationalise a decision to leave Samoa. The job offered represented comfort and good money. I had more or less made up my mind and probably would have avoided meeting Gaopoa if I was forewarned that I was going to meet him by accident. There is healing in knowing that despite the material sacrifices I can look back and say with confidence that I am a better human being for taking the old man’s advice.

Gaopoa was not talking to me. He was talking to the gods of my fathers who inhabit my psyche. He was talking to my ancestors, living and dead, who murmur admonition to my soul. He was talking to the land, the sea and the skies, the antecedents of Polynesian man.

I felt like the man in Francis Thompson’s poem “The Hound of Heaven”. I have not read it for many years but it still echoes in my mind. It is about a man who was running away from God’s gaze and God’s scrutiny. I equate this with the Samoan story of Fatutoa, who was trying to run away from his spiritual and cultural home. Just before Fatutoa launches on a trip to Tonga the spirits of his family, who have turned themselves into a gentle wind, pat him on the back and say: “You must go back, your family needs you and you can only find haven in your spiritual home by restoring relationships with the land and the seas, ancestors and Gods”.

Like Fatutoa, who was touched gently on the back by the winds, I was touched by Gaopoa. Both were the messengers of the Gods, chanting, “You must not run away from your destiny”. And so we say in Samoan: “Ua tata i le tua o Fatutoa le lai o Puava” (the back of Fatutoa was touched gently by the winds of Puava). The healing is not out there, nor is it outside us. The healing comes from our spiritual home. The healing comes from within.

Every Samoan who lives his culture speaks to the dead. The dialogue between the living and the dead is the essence of a Samoan spiritual being. It is this dialogue that provides substance and direction to his life.² In order to understand this dialogue you need to analyse the mythological, the spiritual, cultural and historical reference points of Samoans.

² Thus in former days one of the principal objectives in hostilities was to disrupt this dialogue by exhuming the dead from wherever they were buried or hidden, and burn them. One of the regular features of the constant warfare in 19th century Samoa was the excesses perpetrated on the dead, which in many cases exceeded the excesses on the living.

For if you want sight and insight into my psyche, you will have to speak to the gods who inhabit it. You have to eavesdrop on the dialogue between my ancestors and my soul. You have to address my sense of belonging. For, as I said at the launch of the *O le Taea Afua* report (Tamasese et al. 1998), "I am not an individual; I am an integral part of the cosmos. I share divinity with my ancestors, the land, the seas and the skies. I am not an individual, because I share a "tofi" (an inheritance) with my family, my village and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my sense of belonging."

These are the reference points that define who I am, and they are the reference points of other Samoans.

ALLUSIONS AND SPECIFICS

Allusion and allegory are essential to Samoan religious culture because thesis and antithesis co-exist as synthesis. The contradictory versions of creation are not invalidated by contradiction. They are sustained by the many meanings suggested by allegory and allusion. In that context the cold logic of St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas is arrogance because it presumes the absolute, which is the prerogative of the Godhead. The problems of some Pacific mental health clients originate from trying to cope with the concepts of God, sin and retribution.

A friend of mine explained the basic difference between Northern (European) Catholics and Southern (European) Catholics in this way. The Northern Catholic is obligated to live the ideal every day. The Southern Catholic is obligated to try. Sometimes resolving the difference between living and trying creates stress, which pushes the victim to the boundary and beyond.

Samoan traditional religious culture provides an alternative insight into man's relationship with God. God the progenitor is family. He is not distant, issuing fearful directive. He is intimate, close and compassionate. Heaven is an extension of the extended family.

Allusion, allegory, metaphor are linguistic tools that have the ability to make meaning, to privilege beauty, relatedness and keep the sacredness of the other. Scientific discourse privileges precision and evidence, often to the detriment of beauty, relatedness and intellectual titillation.

To the extent that Samoan language is couched in allusion and allegory, do allusion and allegory lose impact and allure by the scientific attempt to be definitive? Does the suggestion of more than one meaning in allusion and allegory lose power by the attempt to pin down

meaning? Are you imposing a restriction that is inimical to the fundamentals of hint and suggestion? Does the potential to titillate diminish when you restrict by specifics the shades of meanings of real life?

How do religion, theology, allusion and allegory relate to social policy?

More and more my audiences request me to be more specific. More and more my audiences request further explanation. And I ask myself how do you accommodate the duty to teach and simultaneously retain the allure of allusion. Being specific diminishes the allure of allusion. But the message has to impact on the heart and soul for the allusion to endure.

There has to be some understanding as to what the allusion alludes to in order to retain the interest of the young so that they will impart this interest to those who follow. Occasionally one explains with a pang because allusion traditionally was never meant to be definitively explained. It was intended to suggest many meanings and to tantalise the intellect. It was meant to open space for multiple ways of interpretation and to invite rather than to define meaning.

In social intercourse allusion is imperative. Frankness is crass because of its potential to offend. The availability of many meanings can help to save face. This is especially important in a culture where face is the essence of relations between the self and community, and family and community.

Recently I saw a “feau” or message printed on a T-shirt, which illustrates my point. It read: “ ‘Yes’ in English means ‘Yes’, ‘Yes’ in Samoan means ‘Faaoga le Mafaufau’ “. Translation: “Yes, in Samoan, is an invitation to use your head.” Because yes is probably due to courtesy and you have to use your head and ask, notwithstanding the yes, what is the decent thing to do in the circumstances.

The challenge or dilemma for social policy analysts, like mental health services, lies in how to bring together the objectives of allusive and allegorical discussion with the best of social science.

A MESSAGE FROM THE AUMAGA: HANDLING REJECTION

Fa’a Samoa speaks through a feau or message.

In ancient Samoan times, it was custom for the young men’s guild to visit other villages and share a “po ula” (night festivities much condemned by missionaries) with the “aualuma” (young women’s guild). The purpose was social intercourse, entertainment and a search for

wives. When the ladies are loathe to respond, the “aumaga” (young men’s guild) will chant derisively. Their chant may, in translation, seem crude but actually it is subtle humour and derision used to save face in situations of rejection.

In the village of Asau there is the celebrated story of Tafa (my great uncle long deceased). He said to the aumaga, “I want to tell you that tomorrow I shall press my suit with the pastor’s daughter”. As is custom, the aumaga prepared a meal to await Tafa’s return.

Tafa pressed his suit with the pastor and his wife and the pastor responded, “It is not for us to make the decision. We have sent for the girl and you can ask her yourself”. The girl came and Tafa made his offer of marriage. The girl politely refused. Tafa pursued his suit from 10 o’clock in the morning until about 3 o’clock in the afternoon. The girl was adamant that she did not want to marry.

Tafa was in a dilemma: to continue to pursue the suit or confront the aumaga. Either way he would lose face. To redeem himself, he opted for an unusual course of action. As he left he saw a rock fence surrounding the pastor’s house. He strolled across the lawn, climbed the fence and stood at the top, turned his back on the pastor and his family, bowed in the opposite direction, raised his lava lava and called out, “Hey take a look and tell me what time it is!”

When Tafa reached the house of the aumaga the leader of the aumaga asked, “How did it go?” Tafa responded, “Pity me the girl turned down my offer of marriage”. The leader of the aumaga called on the aumaga to join him in chant:

Ua leaga, ua malaia!
Ua taea, ua leaga!
Faamoe ia o le toa,
Soia le toe malaga!

It is bad, it is cursed!
It is shit, it is bad!
Put the cock to sleep,
Let it not travel again!

Indeed there is interaction – certainly not motivated by alofa. But it is better to chant than to be depressed and suicidal.

I worry that the biggest problem that Pacific people have out here is handling rejection. If they do not have access to or use cultural ways of saving face through humour and returning derision, they may be forced to address rejection with violence.

MEANING, NUANCE AND METAPHOR IN SAMOAN HISTORY

History expresses meaning, nuance and metaphor. In August 1924, General George Richardson, Administrator in Western Samoa, wrote to J.D. Gray, Secretary for Foreign Affairs in the Cook Islands. He said, and I quote:

The natives are children and should not be legislated for as if they are a modern people. They are still less than a 100 years from the Stone Age and yet Nelson talks about democracy and British justice which goes down well in New Zealand but such rhetoric is a menace to these people who are not able to understand the arguments arising out of party politics. (Archives reference: IT 1 79/78 Part 1)

In a recent paper on the Mau,³ I said that this was a defining comment, and I was asked why. It is because it defines not only an attitude but, as well, a reference point that purportedly justified a different standard or measure. Unfortunately, this rationale for a different standard was sanctioned by the New Zealand Courts on the grounds that Richardson was not accountable to New Zealand law, but to the terms of the League of Nations mandate. The court stated, and I quote:

It is the Council of the League of Nations which is the judge as to whether the methods adopted for promoting the material and moral wellbeing and social progress of Samoa are wise or unwise...(Court decision re Tamasese, 1929 NZLR 209).

The Samoans in the Mau returned the compliment. They thought Richardson was a child and their view was celebrated by derisive chant. One occasion for this was when Palauli district travelled from Savaii to Upolu to make their talomua presentation during the Mau period. Their fleet would dock at the tip of the Mulinuu peninsula, and from there they organised their parade, known as taalolo, from Mulinuu to Vaimoso. The designated taupou (a ranking unmarried lady) and manaia (the chief or his son) dressed in their finery: tuiga (head dress), whale-tooth necklace, fine mat lava lava, perfumed with scented coconut oil; the chiefs were garbed in fine mats and the orators in tapa cloth. The untitled wore skirts of ti leaves with flower leis, which were the emblem of the Laifoni guild. Small cannons, remnants of earlier wars, preceded the parade firing powder gun salutes. It was an awesome sight. The men and women in tuiga led the procession, wielding nifo oti (ceremonial long knife with a hook in the end), sometimes menacingly, sometimes in an expressive elegant movement.

³ From 1926 antagonism grew amongst Samoans against the New Zealand Fono a Faipule (the Samoan native advisory body). A movement formed, called the Mau, which means opinion, and implied self-determination by the people.

The matai (chiefs and orators) ambled with a grace that Rupert Brook admired. The young men flaunted supple muscular physique accentuated by the design and motif of the Samoan tattoo. Movement was orchestrated by chant. A lead voice clear and sonorous began the chant:

Le Laifoni e, sola i lalō!

to which the rest of the party responded in chorus:

Ai si tefe le Mālō!

Translation:

Laifoni (the honorific reference to the aumaga of Palauli) withdraw below!
Eat semen from circumcising the Malo!

This is Samoan theatre at its best. There is colour, panoply, pageant, drama. Innocent onlookers are charmed, unaware that it is theatre promoting a powerful cultural message. Richardson, as Malo, may posture and puff up himself in uniform and flaunt his power, but by their measure he is a mere nubile boy that they would circumcise and whose semen they would eat. The theatrics are making a political statement about calibre.

The Samoan leadership were used to parleying with high-calibre palagi officials. The point is probably best illustrated by comparing the calibre of German and New Zealand administrators. Solf⁴ returned to Germany and became the Colonial Minister in the Imperial German government. On Richardson's return to New Zealand, Field (1984:123) finds that Richardson:

... faded steadily into obscurity. Living in Auckland, he attempted to run for Parliament but could not even win a nomination. He was forced to quit the Auckland Returned Servicemen Association Committee in a scandal over funds which saw the Secretary drown when his car drove into the sea. He was elected to the Auckland City Council for a time and kept in touch with a number of Faipule to whom he preached a doctrine of anti-Mau hatred.

⁴ Wilhelm Heinrich Solf served 1900-11 as Governor of Western Samoa.

Also, Damon Salesa recently critiqued Colonel Stephen Allen's "Notes on Samoa":

This document was still circulating some 20 years later, and was still considered by some officials to be authoritative. But, the arrogance and racism it contained was startling. Compared to the writings of Te Rangihiroa, both personal and private, or the contemporary work of Keesing or Margaret Mead, even that of other administrators, there is great contrast. Most people who would read it now would probably be appalled. (Salesa 2002)

In contrast, Schultz's⁵ works on Samoan customs, laws and proverbs are still texts.

How do we identify meaning, nuance and metaphor in this context? Meaning is accessible only through the Samoan language. Semen is a metaphor for the essence of life. Literally and figuratively, in the Samoan measure of manhood, compared to his predecessors, Richardson is a nubile boy.

RITUALS

Rituals also express meaning, nuance and metaphor.

At the Helen Clark wreath presentation in Samoa last year, Lufilufi, Falefa and Salani chanted marriage chants. They could have chanted the funeral chants, the birth chants, the war chants, the victory chants. Yet they did not. They were chanting the marriage chants. Why?

In his speech to Helen Clark, Faamatuainu Tala Mailei said in Samoan, and I translate:

Today, Prime Minister Helen Clark, you hear Lufilufi, Falefa and Salani chanting the marriage chants. Why? Because we are not here to mourn, we are here to celebrate the marriage of true minds. For many, many years, Lufilufi waited for this gesture. The words are simple and yet full of meaning: I am sorry. ... When we respond in love and forgiveness, there is a marriage of true minds, which places the message of Tamasese amongst the gods and the angels.

Faamatuainu concluded by saying:

I present this fine mat to seal our marriage. The name of the fine mat is "Le ageagea o Tumua". It was stored in "Mulinuu ma Sepolata'emo", residence of the Tuiatua.

⁵ Dr Erich Schultz served 1910-14 as Vice-Governor and then Governor of Western Samoa.

The ritual is rich in symbolism and history. An explanation of the origin of the name “Le ageagea o Tumua”, i.e. the substance of Tumua, will assist in explaining what I mean.

The Tuitoga had two sons. The elder named Tuitoga after his father, the younger, Lautivunia. Lautivunia had an affair with his older brother’s wife. When the affair became known, the older brother was very angry. As is custom, the younger brother made a peace offering, which was cooked food, wrapped in tolo and fiso leaves. Tolo is sugar cane, fiso is the wild sugar cane. The leaves of the tolo and the fiso underline the message that is, “Please forgive me for we are brothers”. The older brother was not placated and Lautivunia made another peace offering, which included the meat of bananas and the meat of the lei banana. The two varieties of bananas underline the message, “We are flesh and blood, surely you can find it in your heart to forgive me”. The older brother was still not placated. Lautivunia decided that if his older brother did not accept the food offering, then he will offer his life. He dug a hole where his catamaran was housed, placed spears at the bottom of the hole face upwards and committed suicide by throwing himself on the spears. The force of this motion pushed the surrounding earth and sand to cover him.

When Lautivunia’s disappearance was noticed, the father and the brother sent search parties to look for him. A search party reached Tuiatua Leutele in Samoa. Tuiatua Leutele said, “You need not have come so far. Lautivunia is in Tonga under his catamaran.” The search party returned to Tonga and located the body of Lautivunia. The Tuitonga felt obligated and instructed the search party to return to Samoa with the finest of his fine mats, which he named “Le ageagea o Tumua” (the substance of Tumua) to reciprocate Tuiatua Leutele for the favour he had done him. As well, he recognised Tuiatua Leutele’s prophetic powers by naming him Leutele Leiite, that is, Leutele with the prophetic powers.

What is the relevance of this ritual and the name of the fine mat to Prime Minister Helen Clark’s presentation of a wreath at Tamasese’s grave? The story and the act were about kinship. It was about love, it was about death, it was about remorse and it was about forgiveness. We are poorer spiritually and intellectually if we are unaware of the meaning, nuance and metaphor in this ritual.

PIKI PIKI HAMA VAE VAE MANAVA

I would like to extend my metaphors to include my Tongan cousins. “Piki piki hama vae vae manava” is a Tongan saying that was taught to me by a Tongan friend (Aisea Moala) at the Family Start National Pacific Fono two weeks ago. In Samoan it is said, “Pii pii ama, vae vae manava”. Hama in Tongan and ama in Samoan is the outrigger of the canoe. Piki piki in Tongan or pii pii in Samoan is “hold on”, and therefore the phrase means “hold on to the outrigger”.

The outrigger symbolises balance. Whenever there is movement, particularly rough movement inside the canoe or outside the canoe as provoked by wave action, instinctively the fisherman holds onto the outrigger to retain balance. For the canoe to stay afloat, it is dependent on balance provided by the outrigger. Like the canoe, wisdom, knowledge, vision – indeed survival – are founded on balance.

The words “vae vae manava” mean the same in Tongan and Samoan. Vae vae is giving or sharing. Manava is literally your stomach. Manava – same spelling, different pronunciation – is also breathing. Manava and Manava are core symbols in Polynesian expression.

Manava is a core symbol not because of food content, but because it is where new life originates. So you would say in Samoan: “O le manava lea na e ifo mai ai” (translated as “It is from this womb that you fell”). Manava is a core symbol not because of the air you breathe in, but because of the blessing you give as in the blessing the matai imparts to his successor.

So when we say “vae vae manava” we are referring to the ultimate sharing – the sharing of life. The mother giving birth to the child embodies the belief of sharing the breath of life. According to my Tongan friend, “piki piki hama vae vae manava” is the founding principle of our Pacific cultures, i.e. the balance of sharing life and love.

MAMA AND FAGOGO

“Mama” is literally and symbolically food for the young. Literally, the elderly chew food in order to soften it and then they roll this chewed substance into dumplings and place them from the palm of their hand up to the elbow. The young then feed on these dumplings. Traditionally this was how the young were weaned from their mother’s milk.

Mama is more than food. It is spiritual. For the munching imparts into the food spiritual mana from the agaga or spirit of the muncher. It does so in the same way that the ava chewers in the King’s ava impart spiritual mana into the ava or in the way in which the Tulati blesses his designated successor when he blows air into the open mouth of his successor and says, “Ia fa’agaganaina oe e le Atua fetalai” – meaning, “May the God of rhetoric endow you with the gift of tongues”. In this latter case, with his breath the Tulati is imparting spiritual mana.

Mama is a metaphor that connects with the ritual of the “fagogo”, which also has the power to impart spiritual, emotional, physical, mental and cultural nurturance.

A rough translation of “fagogo” is a fairy tale told by the elderly to the young by which the young are soothed to sleep at night. On the face of it, it seems simple. But it is not, because

its value to the Samoan culture is deep. Because it is the process of weaning, of nurturing, of sharing stories, values, rituals, beliefs, practices and language. It helped to sustain and could still sustain a nation.

The demise of the fagogo is a tragic blow to our culture. Because fagogo gave quality time, meaningful time, between generations, to me there is none better than the fagogo. Imagine the young eagerly pressing the elderly: “Le fagogo! Le fagogo!” And the elderly equally eagerly telling the fagogo, finding meaning in the imparting of knowledge, values, stories and love to their young.

The place and power of “matua” (or my elders) and fagogo was brought home to me a few months ago when I had a discussion with Professor Richard Moyle of Auckland University. Somehow our conversation got onto fagogo and he asked if I would like to hear a CD on fagogo. He played me the CD and I was emotional. I was traumatised by fond memories of my childhood. Faaninimo, the principal speaker, was my aunt, whom I was sent to by my father and so lived with as a child. To hear her voice again telling the fagogo and chanting, or as we say, “tagi le fagogo”, overwhelmed me. It was more than memory that affected me. It was more than the voice of the past speaking with such verve and authority. It was the realisation that what was once core in our lives was no more.

During the height of the fagogo the young did not acquire their values from the cinema, television, the radio or from a public spectacle. They heard it from the loving tones of their grandparents or their parents, they were literally fed it from the mama which is lovingly lined along the arm of the “matua”, their grandparent or parent. Thus the Samoan saying: “Ai lava le tagata i le mama a lona matua” – meaning, you derive substance and direction from the mama of your matua.

This Samoan saying, “Ai lava le tagata i le mama a lona matua”, sums up the influence of the fagogo. For each person feeds on the mama of his matua. Matua are not necessarily your biological parents. Matua in this context are mostly the grandparents or the elderly in the family. The role of the matua is to nurture the young so that the young will inherit from them the stories of their struggles and survival, their values, their alofa and their vision for the future.

Both mama and fagogo bespeak the passing on of physical and cultural life from generation to generation in closeness and alofa. It is an image of intimacy, of sharing, of love, of connection and communication. It imparts mana and shares the feau (i.e. a message) between generations.

How can future generations understand the power of the saying: “Ai lava le tagata i le mama a lona matua”? How can you explain the importance of these rituals to passing cultural

knowledge, values, language, hopes and dreams from one generation to the next? How can you explain to future generations the meaningful role of the elderly in our society and that our culture is premised on gaining quality or meaningful time between the young and the old? The powerful influence of my childhood minders on me can be heard today in my Asau dialect. My minders were ladies of my family from Asau. They told me fagogo in the Asau dialect. Thus, the fagogo and the Asau dialect have special meaning for me.

In finding balance and in sharing life and love we have to breathe life into our collective responsibilities. There is reference to pressure through “faalavelave” (elaborate social events), through exploitative involvement in fa’a Samoa or cultural practices, and through unclear cultural and political priorities and unclear collective responsibilities. It has been contended that culture and the values on which it is based are at fault and therefore should be relegated to history. Such arguments have imposed an imperative to reappraise culture and cultural values. In admitting to shortcomings we are not lending support to the bashers of the Pacific Island cultures and values; we are initiating discussion intended to spearhead renaissance and gain the commitment of the young.

IFOGA

I want to end my discussion on rituals with “ifoga”. Ifoga is a ritual where the offending party pleads for pardon from the offended party. In early Samoan times it was done mainly for serious breaches such as murder and adultery. Murder because of the termination of life, and adultery because of the blight on legitimacy.

Murder is the ultimate insult to family honour. Murder is a serious challenge to the family’s ability to protect its own and therefore the family is bound to demonstrate publicly that it has the wherewithal to claim the life or lives of members of the offending family in retribution and to make the point that no one can kill a member of the family with impunity.

Adultery is serious because of the blight on legitimacy. The marriages of the principal matai are a matter of careful calculation, thus the issue of such marriages are known as “tama o le fuafuataga”; literally, the issue of careful calculation.

In these cases, there is an imperative on the family of the offending party to perform ifoga as soon as possible because, in the intervening period between the murder incident and ifoga, retribution by the family of the victim on the family of the perpetrator is culturally permissible.

Protocol and convention dictate that an ifoga is made early in the morning. In Samoan religious culture the rising and the setting of the sun have spiritual significance. The morning symbolises the celebration of a new day. The rising sun stands for illumination and energising.

The morning gives the image of birds singing, soft dew, flowers and plant life at its most alive. “Taulaga”, meaning ritual offering, is thus in harmony with nature in celebrating a beginning.

The composition of the ifoga party can be exclusively family, both immediate and extended. Whether or not the village is included depends on the seriousness of the breach and the offence caused on the injured party.

Traditionally, the culprit and his immediate family are the principals in the ifoga, i.e. they are in the front of the party, kneeling and covered in fine mats. On the right side of the ifoga party are firewood and stones signifying willingness to be baked, to make good the loss of life. If it is judged that the presence of the culprit is unnecessarily provocative, he would be advised to stay back.

It is virtually impossible in Samoan culture to spurn ifoga because ifoga is premised on common genealogy, common history and common heritage. The orator who stands apart from the kneeling group regales family connections, shared values and history and advocates a case for reconciliation and peace.

Ritual acceptance by the offended party occurs when they approach the ifoga party, pull away the fine mats and invite the kneeling pleaders into their official residence. Reciprocal courtesies are exchanged and conclude with the exchange of presentations, “faaoso” by the ifoga party and a “sua/pasese” by the victim’s party.

There are occasions where the offended party are resistant. At this point the village elders and the pastor will intervene. Intervention will make the point that rejection is bad form and will lead to feud and bloodshed. There has been no recorded rejection of an ifoga in the last 30 years. However, there have been cases where an ifoga party was made to sweat it out in the sun and were not accepted until the early hours of the evening.

In the context of fa’a Samoa it is severe punishment for a family and a village to submit themselves to public humiliation acknowledging that their values and their teaching are wanting and defective.

Imagine the shame and remorse of the culprit who looks across at the mother who bore him (vae vae manava), the father who fed him (ai le mama), the elders who nurtured him (through fagogo), kneeling in ifoga, on his behalf.

Ifoga is viable so long as there is a strong bond between the young and the old, the matua and the “fanau”, the parent and the child. If the young are morally and spiritually nurtured and

sustained by video, television, radio and “the flicks”, rather than by their matua, then the bonding which is an essential ingredient in the shaming process of ifoga diminishes and the value of ifoga in this context becomes questionable. This was shown recently in New Zealand where parents and family accepted ifoga, but not the victim, who opted to press a charge for rape.

Three elements sustain ifoga: a sense of remorse and shame by the perpetrator, accountability by the family and village, and forgiveness by the victim’s family.

Forgiveness by the offended party in an ifoga is not forgiveness for its own sake, for it is predicated on the Samoan concept of harmony. Personal harmony inasmuch as nurturing hate and revenge disrupts mental harmony. Family harmony inasmuch as forgiveness guarantees family peace by terminating a potential feud. Political harmony inasmuch as redeeming the sense of self worth of a family and village contributes to harmony at a village and national level.

CONCLUSION

We constantly need to search for meaning, nuance and metaphor to find substance and establish context in our dialogue with our ancestors, with ourselves and with other cultures. In this process we need to recognise that change and pluralism are part of life. A living culture cannot be sustained by ritual or measure that is divorced from the modern contemporary context.

The world I have been speaking about is the world Samoans live in, understand and take their meaning from. It is very similar to the world of our Polynesian cousins, including Māori here in Aotearoa, who also use wonderful nuance, analogy and metaphor to communicate in subtle ways. It is a world that has some similarities with the Palagi or Pākehā world, but it is also at the same time very different.

If you seriously want better outcomes for Pacific young people and their families, then policy settings that influence them need to be congruent with this world. You need to be drawing upon the strengths, understandings and meanings of this world. That will require engaging many more Pacific policy makers, researchers, evaluators and practitioners who are accorded the space to develop their own paradigms around that which is meaningful to them.

That would lead to a plurality of policy settings, of research approaches, of methods of evaluation, and of practices in the field. My point is that policy settings are for human beings, and need to be congruent with the worlds of those human beings. People should draw on the strengths, understandings and meanings of their worlds and have their own role

models leading. In the Pacific case, it would enable policies and practices that will enhance identity, draw upon positive strengths in the cultures and facilitate authentic Pacific development.

If this approach is adopted, I can assure you that Pacific communities could be facilitated much more effectively to participate successfully in education, technology, innovation and the economy in general. It would lead to greater equity and reduce the negative outcomes that persist with some of the current approaches. In their turn Pacific communities will offer something back to the social policy world. They will offer rich new paradigms, greater diversity and colour in practice, and the warm connections of humanity with land, sea and spirituality.

Let me end by saying, “E iloa le lima lelei o le tufuga i le so’ofau” – the mark of good state craft is shown in blending idiosyncrasy.

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