

IS QOHELETH'S TIME POEM A

'FILIGA-O-MOTUGA-AFA'?

A Postcolonial reading of Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 – A Samoan Hermeneutic

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ABSTRACT

The book of Ecclesiastes is one of the most quoted books of the Bible in Samoan oratory. I was a high chief (*'matai'*) while still young, and there I learnt that many of the wise sayings in the traditional Samoan oratory, especially those used by the elderly orators, find many parallels in the book of Ecclesiastes. Likewise, Ancient Israelite wisdom tradition is very similar to Ancient Samoan wisdom in terms of source, purpose and basis. To understand life and impart such knowledge for the good of man, can only be realized when grounded in reverence and fear of God. Qoheleth, the author, is by scholarly consensus, an Israelite Wisdom sage. Well versed in their tradition and a self-proclaimed, wealthy, former king in Israel who is now at a very old age, imparts his wealth of knowledge for the good of his people. There is no doubt the book of Ecclesiastes has always been and will continue to be a contentious, provocative, controversial and for me, a very relevant book in the life of any realist, humanist and Christian. Qoheleth's lack of real identity means he is not confined to a time and location. This eliminates the limits for readers and researchers alike to restrict him to a specific context. This makes the book relevant to all ages as it allows the placement of Qoheleth within the context of scholarly consensus. This thesis attempts at a contribution to explaining the motive(s) behind Qoheleth's writing, and why scholars continue to try to make sense of his negative tone. Placing Qoheleth to the recently determined dating in the post-exilic Persian era, I will therefore, employ a postcolonial reading strategy to formulate an understanding of Qoheleth's context, and why he wrote the poem in Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 in light of the whole book.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work in memory of my late parents,
Toleaofo Uelese Petaia and Pativaine Enari-Petaia,

and also

To my wife Elena Matalavea-Petaia

and

My children

Namuaimana Fagamalama,

Karanita Maafala,

Tenari Ruperake,

Reita Pativaine

and

Aitaua Tauileva

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Karanita Petaia

List of Abbreviations

ANE:	Ancient Near Eastern
B. C:	Before Christ
B. C. E:	Before Common Era
BDB:	The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament
BHS:	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
C. E:	Common Era
Hon:	Honourable
LDC:	Least Developed Countries
NIBC:	The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary
NRSV:	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
NT:	New Testament
OT:	Old Testament
TRIPs:	Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights
WBC:	Word Biblical Commentary
WCC:	World Council of Churches
WTO:	World Trade Organization

INTRODUCTION

The argument of this thesis is that tensions relating to the text of Ecclesiastes¹ 3:1 – 8 in relation to the whole book provides Biblical analogies for an extension of options for Samoan hermeneutics. I will explore the worlds ‘in front of’ and ‘behind the text’ to interpret Qoheleth’s context using a postcolonial reading strategy.² The aim is to bring to light ambivalent parts of the text which constitute tensions that are indicative of Qoheleth’s motive for writing. In doing so, these tensions between the underlying assumptions and the colonial ideologies of the post-exile Persian context of Qoheleth, are revealed.³ ⁴ Being conscious of James Crenshaw’s caution on the tendency of interpretation,⁵ I am thus mindful of using a postcolonial reading strategy in re-reading of a colonial culture to draw attention to the inevitable impact of colonization on historical records and scientific writing.⁶

This paper will employ one of the elements of postcolonial theory, which is a broadly used term but with unique meanings in postcolonial studies and theory called ‘binarism’⁷, which describes the ambivalent relationships between the colonizer and the

¹ In this thesis I will use Ecclesiastes when referring to the book and Qoheleth to the author of the book.

² Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 546-50.

³ Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: In Coogan, Michael D*, (Oxford University Press: The New Oxford Annotated Bible 3rd ed.), 944.

⁴ Michael V. Fox, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ecclesiastes*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), xiv.

⁵ “research into the bookreflects the interpreter’s worldview” which is why scholarly “views on this book vary widely in regards to basic matters as Qoheleth’s optimism or pessimism,and his advocacy of immoral conduct” in James L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes: A Commentary*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1987), 47.

⁶ B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concept*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 120.

⁷ “Binarism according to Ferdinand de Saussure means “that signs have meaning..... by their opposition to other signs. Each sign is itself the function of a binary between the signifier, the "signal" or sound image of the word, and the signified, the significance of the signal, the concept or mental image that it evokes. Although the connection between the signifier and signified is arbitrary (that is, there is no

colonized.⁸ The logic of 'binarism' is in seeing the world in terms of binary oppositions "that establish a relation of dominance. A simple distinction between the opposites represents very efficiently the violent hierarchy on which imperialism is based and which it actively perpetuates."⁹ This enables a dialogue between Qoheleth's context and a postcolonial Samoan perspective relative to its socio-economic, cultural and political issues.

Interpretation of a biblical book takes place in the context of the history of its reception, and awareness of such a history of more than two thousand years of reading Ecclesiastes is vital for its interpretation today.¹⁰ In this respect, care must be taken in interpreting the culture of the text from my own cultural context as an interpreter.

The concern is with the differences in social locations and settings of both the subject and the reader, and therefore, the two perspectives which may be fused in the interpretation process. This is termed as the "fusion of horizons" by Hans-Georg

necessity in nature for the link between the word "dog" and the signified dog), once the link is established, it is fixed for everyone who speaks that language". In binarism "signs mean by their difference from other signs, the binary opposition is the most extreme form of difference possible - sun/moon; man/woman; birth/death; black/white. Such oppositions, each of which represents a binary system, are very common in the cultural construction of reality. The problem with such binary systems is that they suppress ambiguous or interstitial spaces between the opposed categories, so that any overlapping region that may appear, say, between the categories man/woman, child/adult or friend/alien, becomes impossible according to binary logic and a region of taboo in social experience." Such "binaries involve a violent hierarchy, where one side of the opposition is always dominant (man over woman, birth over death, white over black), and that, in fact, the binary opposition itself exists to confirm that dominance." See B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts 2nd Edition*, (U.S.A: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2007), 18-19.

⁸ B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, (1998), 12.

⁹ Some "argue that the very domain of postcolonial theory is the region of "taboo" - the area where the two binary oppositions overlap, is the area in which ambivalence, hybridity and complexity continually disrupt the certainties of imperial logic. The small openings or spaces between the binary oppositions, postcolonial theory is able to upset the structural relations of the binary system itself, revealing the basic contradictions of a system that can include, for instance, the binaries. In this way it uncovers the deep ambivalence of an economic, cultural and political relations that can both, debase and idealize, demonize and eroticize its subjects." see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, (2007), 20.

¹⁰ Craig Bartholomew; Tremper Longman III; *Ecclesiastes* in Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2009), 21.

Gadamer, which is a model that promotes the view of a circular relationship between background and interpretation.¹¹

For the thesis, it is vital to clarify the Samoan context, in order to identify any similarities and differences with the context of Qoheleth because the two are of different time periods and cultures. Effectively this requires informed understanding of the culture and society of Samoa at present, as well as those of Qoheleth in post-exile Israel community. As Charles Taylor points out, “we cannot understand another society until we have understood ourselves better as well.”¹²

In the background of the Samoan colonial context and the contemporary issues which I will address in this paper, are the historical impacts of its colonial past. These influences are due to colonizer interests such as trade, fishing, exploitation of labour, lands, religious and economic ideologies. Postcolonial products such as multi-ethnic, multi-culture, multi-religion and multi-ideologies have become a cause of imbalance in the order of Samoan societal and individual living.

Samoa became independent in 1962, but the impacts of colonialism remained to date. Although foreign workers and administrators were returned to their homelands, some married to locals and made Samoa their home. Samoa thus became a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religion society – a hybrid society.

Samoa has enjoyed fifty years of political independence although it relied heavily on foreign aid as a Least Developed Country (LDC). The recent graduation of Samoa from its LDC status to Developing Country in January 2014,¹³ and its accession to

¹¹ Hans G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975), 271-3.

¹² C. Taylor, “Understanding and Ethnocentrism,” in *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 118.

¹³ See UN-OHRLLS Announces Samoa to Graduate from LDC Status <http://sids-l.iisd.org/news/un-ohrls-announces-samoa-to-graduate-from-ldc-status/>.

World Trade Organization (WTO) membership signals warnings about effects of globalization¹⁴ in many facets of life - the social and spiritual ones included. Member countries of the WTO are subjected to all the rules of trade negotiations. Accession to membership means a country has to change many of its policies and legislations removing protection of its economy, environment, culture, and politics from direct foreign influence.

Consequently, related issues have recently surfaced which demands a discussion in terms of Church role in its relations with Government and the Samoan people. Recently, the Prime Minister, Hon. Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi,¹⁵ was quoted on television and radio on the issue of Casino and businesses opening on Sundays – “it is the role of the church to convince people not to go to casinos or the beach on Sundays (Sabbath)”.¹⁶ The implicit attitude of government is that of isolation from the Church. The government’s contribution for the good of its people is to provide employment, business opportunities – an improved standard of living. There is a responsibility of the Church to prepare the people on how they respond to these changes which can affect their lives adversely. This is the Church’s contribution for what is good for its people - to provide and care for its people’s spiritual lives. As a predominantly Christian society, we look to our faith in God in most trying situations when the power of helplessness and hopelessness dominates our vision of life.

The Government has passed the Samoa Land Titles Registration 2008. This effectively allows registration of Samoan customary lands to be leased to foreigners for

¹⁴ For explanation of some impacts and effects of WTO & Globalization on Samoa, see link below: http://unctad.org/en/Docs/ditctnecdmisc25_en.pdf.

¹⁵ All issues discussed regarding WTO, LDC, Casino and Sabbath as well as the freedom of religion amendment in the constitution have been confirmed by the Prime Minister in an exclusive interview held at his office on 21st August, 2013 at 4.15pm, Apia Samoa. (An audio recording of this interview is available for examination if needed.)

¹⁶ The issue was raised by a radio commentator on an interview with the Samoan Prime Minister that Casinos can be opened on Sundays. The Casino and Gambling Control Act 2010 contains no restrictions on opening days and hours.

any number of years. The authority to administer this has been broken by law, the Samoan decision-making process of ‘soalaupule’ – seeking a unanimous consensus through exchange of logical arguments. It will be determined by those registered under the land title. Samoans view this as deprivation of their inheritance from God.

Postcolonial reading attempts to analyze and criticize the worldview and politics of knowledge. This can be done through studying the purposes of functional relations of social and political power within a colonial environment — the how and the why of an imperial regime’s representations - social, economic, political, cultural – of the imperial colonizer and of the colonized people. Postcolonialism questions and reinvents the methods of social perception as in the ways of viewing and how others view us.

By juxtaposing, the two should see connections and creates bonds between the texts and treats them as equal partners. In this way, the use of postcolonial in this thesis avoids the rhetoric of blame and criticism through fusion and compromise, but rather focuses on discrepancies and complementarities in them.

According to Paula Gooder, “Postcolonial criticism interprets the Bible from the perspective of those who seek to engage with the legacy of colonial rule.”¹⁷ Studies find that postcolonial theory has a dual aim. One is to analyze how historical scholarship organized and studied colonial cultures; and secondly, to recover how the resistant literature of the colonized tried to redeem their cultures and restore their identity and dignity.¹⁸

According to Sugirtharajah, postcolonialism initially known as a resistant and creative literature, “is seen no longer as a natural evolutionary progression following on from the departure of colonial powers, but a series of critical and political protests since

¹⁷ Paula Gooder, *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 175.

¹⁸ Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonial Criticism”, in Paula Gooder, *Searching for Meaning*, 175.

the beginning of modern colonialism.”¹⁹ Postcolonial criticism therefore targets the empire and its impacts as a main focus for biblical studies as it provides analogies and more that are relevant to current situations.

In this research, I use a Samoan concept termed ‘*Motuga-afa*’ as a link between the biblical Wisdom tradition²⁰ and the Ancient Samoan Wisdom tradition²¹. ‘*Motuga-Afa*’ is a humble expression used in traditional Samoan forums ‘*faa-faletui*’, which is a gathering of leaders – the elders or decision makers. The expression is used to refer to one’s contribution to the discussion or debate on a matter at hand. Ancient Samoan wisdom in its decision-making does not accept a simple majority. It only finds resolution in a unanimous agreement and no contribution is rendered useless. Like ‘*motuga-afa*’ which is plaited together with other ‘*motuga-afa*’ to make a good ‘*afa*’, all contributions are used to make a unanimous solution or provide links that are strong and binding.

Traditional Samoan wisdom is vested in its elders for they have experienced and understood life over their long years. The plaiting and weaving of the ‘*afa*’ (sennit) is primarily done by the elderly men. When there is a demand for ‘*afa*’ to make fishing net, a boat, a ‘*fale*’ (Samoan house) and handicrafts, each will be asked to provide their ‘*motuga-afa*’ (contribution) to be combined for the purpose. ‘*Motuga-afa*’ here is used in the figurative sense to mean a person’s contribution to the matter at hand when making decisions in the village council meeting, Church or other forums in Samoan society. The use of ‘*motuga-afa*’ is an expression of humility, “I do not have a complete solution to our problem, but here is my ‘*motuga-afa*’ (contribution)”. In a traditional Samoan forum, all opinions matter, as is with ‘*motuga-afa*’. The concept is symbolic of

¹⁹ Sugirtharajah, “Postcolonial Criticism”, in Paula Gooder, *Searching for Meaning*, 175.

²⁰ Wisdom tradition is discussed in Section 1.1 (see footnote 4) notes of this thesis.

²¹ Ancient Samoan Wisdom Tradition is discussed in Section 2.2 of this thesis.

Samoan Wisdom due to its association with the elderly who are seen as the wise in traditional Samoan society. Their contribution is that of Samoan wisdom which is imparted to their people for the good of the individual and society. These will be discussed further in the thesis.

This paper is divided into three chapters. Chapter one focuses on the postcolonial reading of the text,²² exegetical work done on the book of Ecclesiastes and its place in the Wisdom literature and the Bible. This chapter also examines the accepted view on the authorship, the favoured dating of the book, its structure and setting as well the function of the book. In doing so, I will allude to some of the relevant themes of the book which are conducive to the purpose and argument of the thesis. Finally, I will discuss the exegetical work performed on the Biblical text Ecclesiastes 3: 1 ~ 8.

Chapter two discusses further the concept ‘*Motuga-Afa*’ and its significance in Samoan wisdom tradition. I will also provide a brief outline of Samoa’s colonial history until its independence to give a background for the contemporary issues discussed in the thesis. Furthermore, the chapter entails a development of the type of reading(s) used in this study - from the traditional worldviews to a postcolonial reading. A discussion of socio-economic, cultural, political and theological issues both in the local and the post-exilic Israelite community is vital to the argument of this thesis. How do they contrast? Is a fusion of horizons construed from such a comparison?

Chapter three involves a cross-culture juxtaposition of Qoheleth’s context and the contemporary issues of the Samoan context. A discussion of the positives and negatives

²² “As these texts originated from persons situated in the contexts of one or more of these conversations, we need to read the Bible dialectically, and be sensitive to conflict and counter statement, placing every action and statement in relation to the parts of the conversations that have gone before, and those that will come after”; Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That are Transforming the Faith*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), (Taken from material extracted by the author himself in his *A New Kind of Bible Reading*).

arising out of this research shall determine whether they are helpful in the formation and practice of Samoan hermeneutics.

The paper will conclude by surveying the ‘world behind the text’ and the ‘world in front of the text’, and draw some conclusions, by bringing forth key points that were identified in the discussions. Did the reading strategy used enable us to achieve the aim of the paper? What is the church’s position in contemporary Samoa?

CHAPTER 1

A POSTCOLONIAL READING OF ECCLESIASTES 3: 1~8

This chapter focuses on the interpretation of the book of Ecclesiastes through the works of various scholars. I have mentioned some of the features of postcolonial reading earlier and the element of binarism, “which is used primarily to describe the way colonial ideology constructs a world of meaning, in which the colonist maintains a privileged position through the use of language – that is by means of a cultural hegemony expressed in the everyday language of the colony.”¹

As mentioned earlier, such ideology promotes the idea that areas in between the opposites, such as black and white, are offensive and forbidden. This means to engage in any mixing or to suggest that there is a livable zone between the two is scandalous and therefore, prohibited. The most extreme expression of this forbidden area was seen in the “Apartheid.”² It is within that ‘in-between’ zone that the postcolonial study attains its full status as a liberation theory. Given binary oppositions that enforce mutual exclusion, postcolonialism seeks to foster inclusiveness and multiculturalism.³

¹ <http://www.ricorso.net/tx/ENG312/Teaching/Classroom/Lectures/Lecture05.htm#Binarism> (Accessed on July 30th 2013), at 11.48pm.

² It is “the state of being apart” - was a system of racial segregation enforced through legislation by the National Party (NP) governments, who were the ruling party from 1948 to 1994, of South Africa, under which the rights of the majority black inhabitants of South Africa were curtailed and white supremacy and Afrikaner minority rule was maintained.

³ <http://www.ricorso.net/tx/ENG312/Teaching/Classroom/Lectures/Lecture05.htm#Binarism> (Accessed on July 30th 2013), at 11.48pm.

1.1 Features of the text and Wisdom Tradition⁴

The book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible (Protestant Canon) is classified in the ‘Wisdom Literature’⁵ whereas the Hebrew Canon has it under the ‘Writings’⁶ as wisdom literature. In order to understand the book of Ecclesiastes, one must understand the Wisdom Tradition therefore, within the book and the context of the book.

The book of Ecclesiastes portrays Israelite Wisdom tradition which James L. Crenshaw describes as “the quest for self-understanding in terms of relationships with things, people and the Creator.”⁷ We learn through Biblical wisdom tradition, therefore, that it deals mainly with human life and how it relates with its surroundings. According to Crenshaw, human life is central to the purpose of wisdom literature which aims at understanding the world in which humanity exists.⁸

Israelite Wisdom tradition is similar and could have been influenced by ANE tradition⁹ with the difference being that Israelite wisdom anchors on the Deuteronomistic principle¹⁰, and “Fear God is Wisdom”.

⁴ According to Mark Sneed (“Is the Wisdom Tradition a Tradition” in *CBQ* (2011), 50), James L. Crenshaw believes that Hebrew wisdom literature was produced by a group of sages. Mark Sneed agrees with Crenshaw that Hebrew wisdom literature is the distinctive literature of the sages. In citing Jeremiah 18:18, which refers to the intellectual leaders of Israel (prophet, priest, and sage), Crenshaw argues that the sages and their tradition are to be distinguished from the traditions of the other two; see James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981; 3rd ed., 2010 [references are to the 1981 ed.]) 28-9.

⁵ W. Sibley Towner, *The Book of Ecclesiastes: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections: NIBC*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 273-4.

⁶ Roland E. Murphy, Roland E., *Ecclesiastes: WBC*, (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 2002), xxiii.

⁷ Quoted by Mark Sneed, (“Is the Wisdom Tradition a Tradition” in *CBQ* (2011), 52) from James Crenshaw “Method in Determining Wisdom Influence upon ‘Historical’ Literature,” in *JBL* 88 (1969), 132.

⁸ Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, (1981), 62.

⁹ Tremper Longman III and Arthur J. Bellinzoni find Israelite Wisdom tradition similarities in ANE Literature. According to Longman III, Israelite and ANE wisdom are similar in style, form, content and themes. For example the themes of scepticism and *carpe diem* in earlier ANE literature are very similar to the themes in Ecclesiastes. See Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 18-19 C.f. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 144; Arthur J. Bellinzoni, *The Old Testament: An Introduction to Biblical Scholarship*. (New York: Prometheus Books, 2009), 273-4.

¹⁰ Deuteronomic formula, where righteousness equals wealth (blessing) and wickedness equals poverty (curse).

As Hebrew Wisdom is anthropocentric it is concerned with determining what is good for man which it determines that good to be “wealth, honor, health, and long life” (1 Kings 3:11). The foundational idea of order which God has established and man can search and discover is the ground that establishes this search for the good life. Wisdom is largely concerned with order,¹¹ individual and societal order. This order suggests a design or purpose which the wise man is expected to know and therefore be able to do the right at the right time and place.

The search for understanding and order has its limitations and the wise man is aware of those limitations of humanity, the fact that man cannot fully comprehend God. The reality of life experience caused the sage to realize the numerous possibilities as well as humanity’s limitations.¹² The wisdom saying in the Bible of, ‘the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’ derived from the concept of reality, as Crenshaw argues. This reality means that there is a reward for virtue and a punishment for sin. It is therefore understood, that an element of justice is built-in to this theology. This built-in justice mechanism is in tension with God’s freedom to do what he desires, which contradicts human understanding of justice. The issue here is that the absence of justice, or at least “the human perception of such absence, means a possible return to chaos.”¹³ According to Crenshaw,

“The order, which serves as the foundation for wisdom thought, faces a crisis and possible reversal into chaos whenever the theology of retribution does not seem to stand; confidence in the divine power and the concept that

¹¹ Gerhard von Rad defines wisdom writing, “Israelite ‘wisdom’ was known as a practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world, based upon experience.” He goes on to note that Israel’s concept of wisdom would change but would always have as its foundation practical knowledge based on experience. Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; 2 vols; Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1962) 1: 418. Although von Rad’s definition is not as accurate as Crenshaw’s, the emphasis on order is the same as von Rad’s understanding. He writes “Wisdom... very similar to the Egyptian concept of *Ma’at*; wisdom’s pursuit is thus an endeavor to find and continue order consisted in knowing that at the bottom of things an order is at work, silently and often in a scarcely noticeable way, making for a balance of events.” Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1: 428.

¹² Crenshaw, “Prolegomenon,” in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, 23. (ed. Crenshaw), 1-60.

¹³ Crenshaw, “Prolegomenon”, 26 (ed. Crenshaw), 1-60.

there is a reciprocal relationship between virtue and reward as well as vice and punishment.”¹⁴

1.2 Setting and Function

The dating of Ecclesiastes is very important in order to identify contemporary issues of the book’s context – social, economic and political. In this respect, I will highlight some of the prominent scholarship on the date setting then the relevant dating to the discussion in this thesis. Many commentators believe the language of the book is closer to post-exilic Hebrew, and this provides strong evidences for the theories on the time of its composition.

“The words of Qoheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem” in 1:1 has historically been interpreted that Solomon is the author of the book of Ecclesiastes. This places the date of the book in the mid-tenth century B.C.E. “According to Daniel Fredericks, this traditional understanding began to change when Luther, refuted the Solomonic authorship, on the basis that language and other aspects of the text suggested a post-exilic dating.”¹⁵

The Qumran fragments¹⁶ of the book, as many scholars have mentioned in their studies, suggest possible Greek influence, historical allusions within the text, the overall tone and mood of the book, and linguistic considerations of the book in the interest of determining its date. There seems to be a general scholarly agreement that the book had its composition some time from the fifth to second century B.C.E. The language as well as other aspects of the text point to a date in the post-exilic period.¹⁷

¹⁴ Crenshaw, “Prolegomenon”, (ed. Crenshaw), 1-60.

¹⁵ Daniel Fredericks, *Qoheleth’s Language: Re-evaluating Its Nature and Date*, (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 1.

¹⁶ Fragments of Ecclesiastes present at Qumran339 suggest the middle of the second century B.C.E.; Thomas Krueger, *Qoheleth: A Commentary*, (trans. O.C. Dean Jr; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 36.

¹⁷ Daniel Fredericks, *Qoheleth’s Language: Re-evaluating Its Nature and Date*, (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988), 1. Fredericks himself does not support the dating used in this dissertation. His

The thought and style of the book implies a late dating of the book when compared to other Old Testament writings. Through a study of Persian loan words and Aramaisms and late developments in Hebrew form and syntax suggests a fourth or third century B.C. dating.¹⁸

Choon-Leong Seow proposes a more specific time frame within the early fourth or even late fifth century based on the use of the verbal root *šlt* in fifth century Aramaic documents.¹⁹ Dominic Rudman also traced the term still existing into the Hellenistic era.²⁰ Seow however strongly believes that while a Hellenistic dating cannot be ruled based on linguistic evidence, there is no overwhelming evidence or reason to treat this dating as conclusive. “The language of Ecclesiastes fits best in the last hundred and twenty years of Archaemenid rule in Palestine.”²¹ Seow strengthens his position on a Persian period dating by citing Szubin and Porten²²:

“Indeed, the terminological and thematic links between Ecclesiastes and Aramaic documents of the Persian period are without parallel; there is no similar coincidence of a cluster of idioms in the Hebrew and Aramaic dialects of other periods. By the same token, the idiom *hšlyt lšt mtt* (“to authorize to take up a grant”) in 5:18-19 reflects an equivalent technical idiom in Persian-period Aramaic, *šlyt lmnš dšn*’ (“authorization to take up the grant”).”²³

Many commentaries find that Ecclesiastes also exhibits a number of late Biblical Hebrew characteristics which exhibit significant differences from standard Biblical

work along with that of Gleason Archer [Gleason Archer, “Linguistic Evidence for the Date of ‘Ecclesiastes’ *JETS* 12 (1969): 167-181] would be sources for contrasting views.

¹⁸ William P. Brown, *Ecclesiastes Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville Kentucky: WJK, 2011), 8.

¹⁹ Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: The Anchor Bible 18C*, (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 12-21; “Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qoheleth,” 646-50.

²⁰ Dominic Rudman, “A Note on the Dating of Ecclesiastes” in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999), 47-52.

²¹ Seow, “Linguistic Evidence,” in *CBQ* (2010), 643-66.

²² See H. Z. Szubin and B. Porten, “Royal Grants in Egypt: A New Interpretation of Driver 2,” *JNES* 46 (1987), 39-48.

²³ Choon-Leong Seow, “Theology when Everything is Out of Control”, in *Ecclesiastes Interpretation; July 2001; 55, 3; Pro-Quest Religion*, 240.

Hebrew. Franz Delitzsch as early as 1875 noted a long list of *hapax legomena*²⁴ in the book and therefore concluded that the book belonged to a period after the exile, no earlier than the time of Ezra-Nehemiah.²⁵

Given this background, I have concurred with the findings that the book of Ecclesiastes was created during the Persian administration when much cultural disorder affected much of the ancient world.²⁶ Socioeconomic change of the time asked many questions of the wisdom tradition, with regard to the contemporary issues of social, economic and political nature. Those issues speak to the present tensions in Samoa which I will discuss further in this chapter.

1.3 Ecclesiastes – Form, Structure, Authorship and Intended audience

The book of Ecclesiastes in my view is an abnormal and startling book in the Bible due to its pessimistic overtone. It has, however, become the voice to an experience not usually thought of as religious – the pain and infuriation experienced in a critical gaze at life's meaninglessness and injustices. Qoheleth sees things that are disturbing, the twists and imbalances in the world; the ineffectuality of human deeds; the uselessness and limitations of human wisdom and righteousness. This experience coexists with the belief in God whose power, justice and unpredictability are sovereign – in the post-exile.²⁷

²⁴ '*hapax legomena*' (Gr. "once said"), words which are only once recorded in a certain kind of literature.

²⁵ Carl F. Keil, and Franz Delitzsch, *Ecclesiastes*, (trans. by M. G. Easton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 190-197; See Delitzsch for a list and explanation of these words, as the purpose of this section is pin-pointing the relevant dating.

²⁶ Brown, *Ecclesiastes Interpretation*. (2011), 7.

²⁷ Michael Carasik, "Qoheleth's Twists and Turns", in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 2003, 28; 192 DOI: 10.1177/030908920302800204, 192-209.

The true identity of Qoheleth with regard to a name, actual dating and location has not been determined beyond doubt. However, it is essential to understand who the author was in terms of character, a perceived socio-historic background, and who the intended audience was, so we may be better able to put into proper perspective the significance of his message, the world behind the text.

Traditionally Qoheleth was identified with King Solomon in Jerusalem until scholars disputed this on several grounds. Language and background assumptions point to a post-exilic dating. The epilogue does not talk about Qoheleth as king but only in 1:12 – 2:26 after which it only shows perspectives of a non-royal sage who may have had contact with rulers and would have reason to fear their erratic anger (8:24, 9). Qoheleth also blames the royal administration for the social injustices (5-7) which would be impossible for Solomon himself who founded the Judean royal administration to do. His intended audience therefore can only be the post-exile Israelite community which is trying to survive the anomalies and oppression of colonial ideologies and do not appear to know it.

Although a majority of modern scholars argue that Qoheleth is not Solomon, almost all of them believe that the author of Ecclesiastes wants us to think he was Solomon. I concur the author's intention was to use Solomon as a pseudonym, a disguise of his real identity.

1.4 Context Consciousness

In attempts to explain the book of Ecclesiastes' teachings as Biblical canon, opponents argued that the author's thoughts were moulded and incited by other ANE traditions and Greek philosophy. His views were mostly described based on such a pre-

supposition – most notably the known foreign influence – or his personal character and taste or preference.²⁸ Some say Qoheleth was either a pessimist or optimist because of his training or because of the way he was. Other critics think otherwise looking to various theories in the editorial process such as multiple redactions, and dialogue with opponents within rhetorical strategies. As a result interpreters who argue for one character run the risk of dismissing the opposite supporting passages as evidence of “wishful thinking” that provided “psychological relief.”²⁹

1.5 Social, Cultural, Political and Economic context

Michael V. Fox views Qoheleth as observing contradictions in the world.³⁰ However Fox maintains that Qoheleth’s complaints are not related to any specific socio-historical conditions of his time.³¹ Despite the fact that Fox only investigated Qoheleth’s intellectual background and his reaction to traditions, many have followed his reluctance to look into the socio-historical context of Qoheleth.^{32 33}

However, if the author is said to have drawn lessons from his life experiences, it means he had a social location. Seow therefore reasons that the most common verb in

²⁸ For psychological explanations of Qoheleth’s characteristics, see K. Galling, “Kohelet-Studien,” ZAW 50 (1932) 281; F. Zimmermann, *The Inner World of Qoheleth* (New York: KTAV, 1973).

²⁹ William H. U. Anderson, *Qoheleth and its Pessimistic Theology: Hermeneutical Struggles in Wisdom Literature*, Mellen Biblical Press Series 54 Lewiston/Queenstown/Lampeter: Mellen Biblical Press, 1997), 73.

³⁰ Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Re-reading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 3. See also Qoheleth and his Contradictions, JSOTSup 71 (Sheffield: Almond, 1987; reprint 1989) passim.

³¹ Fox, *Qoheleth and His Contradictions*, 143.

³² Choon-Leong Seow, “Theology When Everything is out of Control, Interpretation”; 2001; 55, 3; ProQuest Religion, 237-84.

³³ Walter Brueggemann, “The Social Significance of Solomon as a Patron of Wisdom” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. John Gammie and Leo Perdue; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 117-32. Brueggemann favours the sociological approach that considers the fact that there must have been a sociological reason for the text to appear as they did. If it is simply based on legend, there must have been a reason for the formation of the legend. This tradition, historical or not, did not occur in a vacuum.

the book is *r'h* (“to see, experience”), and in twenty-six times the author is the subject.³⁴ Moreover, Qoheleth sees what is happening in his existential world (1:14; 7:13; 8:9) people’s concerns and efforts (3:10; 4:4, 7; 5:12-14; 8:16), unpredictability of God as reflected in the unequal distribution of wealth and honour (2:24; 6:1-2), societal order reversed (3:16; 10:7), unrestrained and violent injustice and oppression (3:16; 4:1; 8:9), and conflicts between tradition and reality (7:15; 8:10; 9:11,13). Then there are the more specific situations such as the man who accumulated wealth only to lose it in one “bad venture” (5:13-14); the solitary individual who was unable to stop striving (4:7-8), and the instance where the poor and the rich seemed to have exchanged places (10:7).³⁵ These experiences could not have been mere abstract or conceptualization.

William P. Brown places Qoheleth’s socio-historic context alongside Seow’s dating and background. In order to understand the message from the passage below as well as the rest of the book of Ecclesiastes in relation to the whole Bible, Brown places Qoheleth in the context of the Persian/early Hellenistic period.³⁶ Judah had suffered the agonies of defeats and exile by the Babylonians (597-538 B. C.) When the Babylonian empire fell under the Persian king Cyrus II in 539, Judah came under Persian rule. The royal decree of the king Cyrus saw the release of Judah in 538. Although they enjoyed some form of independence compared to what they suffered under other empires, it still had to contend with surviving under foreign control (Persian to Hellenistic to Roman empires). Beginning in the Persian era (539-337 B.C.) several socio-economic developments occurred, which dramatically and permanently changed the social landscape of Palestine. The largely predominant subsistence agricultural economy of the

³⁴ Ecc 1:14, 16; 2:1, 3, 12 24; 3:10, 16, 22; 4:1, 4, 7, 15; 5:12, 17; 6:1; 7:15; 8:9, 10, 16, 17.

³⁵ William P. Brown, *Ecclesiastes – Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Know Press, 2011), 8-9.

³⁶ Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, (2011), 8-9. See Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes*. Anchor Bible 18C. (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 12-21; See also “Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qoheleth,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996), 643-66.

pre-exile became largely commercialized at the beginning of 5th century.³⁷ One of the most compelling measures imposed by the Persian imperial rule was the standardization of currency to facilitate the collection of taxes, enhance trade from Egypt to Persia, simplify and expedite disbursements by government. The common currency meant a drastic transformation from a non-monetary to a monetary economy. Such a revolution was documented in government records found in the imperial city of Persepolis. By late sixth century payments were still made by goods, but they were accounted for in monetary values. The first full payment in cash was recorded in 469 B. C. E. in the imperial city. Archaeological evidence found that these coins were found sporadically in Palestine from the end of the sixth century. Hoards of these were found in numerous locations in Palestine in early fourth century. Seow further states that evidence of a marked increase of commercialism in the newly repatriated Yehud indicated that money was in circulation there before the Hellenistic period.³⁸

Brown attests to an efficient and aggressive taxation system introduced under the Persian imperial rule. A new market-driven cash economy on a global scale emerged, with many entrepreneurial opportunities. However, these developments did not see an equal distribution of its benefits amongst the people. Those who had had extensive capital outlays benefitted substantially as they took unprecedented opportunities for cultivating greater assets. Those with lesser capitals faced a distinct disadvantage. This resulted in the middle class being overwhelmed by the overabundance of opportunities as well as high risks which saw a person reap profit one day and lose everything the next.³⁹ Failure meant people had to make loans to pay off loans and some end up losing

³⁷ C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 23.

³⁸ Seow, "Theology When Everything is out of Control", 240-1; See also C. E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study*, JSOTup 294 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 23.

³⁹ William P. Brown, *Ecclesiastes*, 9.

their lands used as collateral. Others who have lost all assets used their children and/or themselves as guarantee which meant being enslaved in the nearest sense. Taxes and additional levies on administration and financing services heavily burdened the ordinary Israelite.⁴⁰ The corrupt which included politicians prospered and the wise and righteous were not necessarily rewarded. The Deuteronomic formula was frowned at with contempt.

The following outline is a reduced version of Towner's version which I believe provides a simple flow of Qoheleth's messages relevant to the discussion of the thesis.

I. Ecclesiastes 1.1 Superscription

II. Ecclesiastes 1:2 – 12:8 The Deliberations of Qoheleth

A. 1:2, Theme: Vanity of Vanities, All is Vanity

B. 1:3 – 2:26, Illustrations of the Theme of Absurdity

C. 3:1 – 15, Reflections on the Meaning of Time

D. 3:16 – 4:8, Reflections on Justice and Death

E. 4:9 – 6:12, Aphorisms

F. 7:1 – 8:17, A first Miscellany

G. 9:1-12, Time and Chance befall all

H. 9:13 – 11:6, A second Miscellany

I. 11:7 – 12:8, Instructions for a young person and conclusion

III. Ecclesiastes 12:9-14, The Epilogues⁴¹

⁴⁰ C. L. Seow, "The Socioeconomic Context of the Preacher's Hermeneutic", (PSB 17, 1996), 174-6.

⁴¹ Towner, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, in New Interpreters Bible, 286.

1.6 Translation: Hebrew to English (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)

¹ לְכָל זְמַן וְעַתָּה לְכָל־חַפֵּץ תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם: ס

² עֵת לִלְדֹת וְעֵת לָמוּת עֵת לִטֵּעַ וְעֵת לִעָקֹר נְטוּעַ:

³ עֵת לְהָרוֹג וְעֵת לְרַפֹּא עֵת לִפְרוֹץ וְעֵת לִבְנוֹת:

לְבָכּוֹת וְעֵת לְשָׂחֹק עֵת סִפּוֹד וְעֵת רִקְדּוֹד:

אֲבָנִים וְעֵת כְּנוֹס אֲבָנִים עֵת לַחֲבֹק וְעֵת לְרַחֵק⁴ עֵת

⁵ מִחֲבֹק: עֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ

לְבַקֵּשׁ וְעֵת לְאַבֵּד עֵת לְשָׁמֹר וְעֵת לְהַשְׁלִיךְ:

שָׁלוֹם: ס^{42 7} עֵת לְקַרֹּעַ וְעֵת לְתַפּוֹר עֵת לַחֲשׂוֹת וְעֵת לְדַבֵּר:⁶ עֵת

⁸ עֵת לְאַהֲבָ' וְעֵת לְשֹׂא עֵת מִלְחָמָה וְעֵת

¹ For all, there is an **appointed time**, and a time for all matter under the heavens: (my translation)

² a time to **bear children**, and a time to **be killed**;

a time to **be planted**, and a time to **be destroyed**

³ a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to **break out from enclosure**, and a time to **rebuild**;

⁴² Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997.

⁴ *a time to weep, and a time **to utter mockery**;*

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵ *a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather together stones;*

*a time to embrace, and a time to **be far from embrace**;*

⁶ *a time to seek, and a time **to destroy**;*

a time to keep watch, and a time to throw away;

⁷ *a time to tear, and a time to sew together;*

a time to be silent, and a time to speak;

⁸ *a time to love, and a time to hate;*

a time for war, and a time for peace.

The poem⁴³ in the text above gives the reader the impression that there is a definite rhythm and order to existence on earth; however, it would be incorrect to conclude from this that everything that occurs in the world is straightforward and predictable. The dichotomies listed in verses 2-8 do not represent all the activities that occur in life “under the heavens” (v.1). These fourteen pairs of dichotomies formulates the poem excluding the first verse. “In Hebrew speech, the mentioning of opposites together expresses totality. For example, ‘heaven and earth’ stand for all of physical and

⁴³ I refer to an article by J. Blenkinsopp, “Ecclesiastes 3:1-15: Another Interpretation,” JSOT66 (1995), 55-64. , where he argues that the poem is not Qoheleth’s but a quotation from a “stoicizing Jewish sage” who is seemingly unaffected by pleasure or pain.

spiritual reality. Thus, these fourteen pairs are meant to be representative of all the activities of life”.⁴⁴

The poem however must be read in its immediate context which also includes verses 9-15. These give the implication of the state of affairs behind the text. The poem’s clear rhythm and constant use of the infinitive construct form; repetition of the word “time” and the dichotomies pit against each other, all provide a sonnet that beautifully disguises its bleak message in verse 9 which repeats the thought of 1:3, “What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?” - What profit is there?⁴⁵

1.7 Exegesis of Ecclesiastes 3:1 - 8

In the first verse, תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם "under the heavens" is used 29 times in Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Old Testament⁴⁶, simply means "on the earth," that is, in terms of human existence. The phrase suggests that the writer's perspective is universal, and not limited to his own people and land. This also shows that Qoheleth is looking at life from a purely human perspective on the earth without divine revelation from God. The exclusion of this phrase directs the attention of its intended audience to the poem (3:2-8) as containing a special message. Contrary to Hebrew speech tradition that the form of the poem indicates ‘totality’ and ‘universality’, the undisputed fact that Qoheleth wanted his audience to believe he was an Israelite king (1:1) indicates that his message was exclusive for the Israelite post-exilic community.

⁴⁴ Dan Liroy, *The Divine Sabotage: An exegetical and Theological Study of Ecclesiastes 3*, (This essay is a preliminary version of material to appear in a forthcoming monograph being researched and written by the author (Liroy). The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the South African Theological Seminary.), 115-209.

⁴⁵ Tremper Longman III, “The Book of Ecclesiastes” in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 111-25.

⁴⁶ Ecclesiastes (1:9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 7, 15; 5:13, 18; 6:1, 5, 12; 8:9, 15, 17; 9:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 10:5; cf. 1:13; 2:3).

For all, there is an appointed time, and a time for all matter under the heavens:

The term זמן in verse (1) meaning “appointed time” is translated as “season” in most English versions. Whereas “season” refers to a fixed known time-period, “appointed time” is dependent on someone or something in control. With the term ‘season’ the events being referred to implies a fixed cyclical recurrence. The term ‘appointed time’ is therefore more suitable in that the events mentioned are ‘control-dependent’ - their time of occurrence is not in a fixed cycle.

a time to bear children, and a time to be killed;

a time to be planted, and a time to be destroyed;

The verb ילד in verse (2) translated as “be born” in most English translations is a qal infinitive construct translated as ‘to bear’, ‘to bring forth’ or ‘to beget’⁴⁷ commonly used to refer to a mother and child. To ‘be born’ is an uncontrolled event which takes place in its due course. To ‘bear’, ‘beget’ is to give birth suggests the event as being caused or forced to make happen by another. Like a mother having to bear children for the purpose other than one’s own desire. The event is not a universal experience for all – some women are not able to bear children – hence a directive to those who are able.

The term מות is in the qal infinitive construct translated “to die” refers to (of man) die of natural cause or as a result of smiting, penalty, by human authority or capital punishment.⁴⁸ The verb refers to ‘die’ from old age or a severe illness; and it is

⁴⁷ To procreate or generate offspring (especially of a male parent). Jess Stein, Laurence Urdang. *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, College Edition. See also, F. Brown, S. Driver, C. Briggs. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 408, 510, 529.

⁴⁸ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 510, 559, 607.

also used to refer to die from inflicting a heavy blow with the hand, tool or a weapon. It also refers to ‘die’ from capital punishment – suggests one that is under oppression or authority and control of another.

The term **נָטַע** is qal infinitive construct translated “to plant” as in vines, olive trees, garden but is also used figuratively to mean “to establish people”. The inference is that people like plants can be ‘planted’ or ‘established’ at a given time, and also uprooted or destroyed at a given time.⁴⁹ **עָקַר** “pluck up” or “destroy” what was planted.⁵⁰ The alternative verb is “destroy”, but the verb is also suggested to mean ‘sell something to, or obtain something from, by force and especially underhanded activity’.

a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break out from enclosure, and a time to rebuild;

In verse (3) **הָרַג** translates as “kill” implies ruthless violence usually refers to the slaying of survivors in a battle. It is also used to refer to God’s slaying in judgment.⁵¹ The action is certainly a very offensive one under the authority and control of someone. Is it necessary to kill? **רָפָא** “heal” hurts of nation, involving (restored) favour and, often, forgiveness. The verb **פָּרַץ** meaning “break down” also means “break-through”, “break or burst out” from womb; from enclosure.⁵² The verb’s connotation is that of violence and use of force to break away, free, of slave from a master; in sudden judgment.

⁴⁹ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 510, 642.

⁵⁰ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 510, 785.

⁵¹ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 246, 510.

⁵² Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 510, 829.

a time to weep, and a time to utter mockery;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

In verse (4.) שִׁחַק “laugh” implies a ‘laugh at’ or in contempt, derision hence “utter mockery”.⁵³ סָפַד “mourn” in NRSV is translated as “lament” or “wail” for the dead with loud cries and also with a feeling of guilt on the part of those wailing because of calamity or judgment.⁵⁴ רָקַד “dance” is also meant “skip about” a merry action usually describes children skipping about.⁵⁵

a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather together stones;

a time to embrace, and a time to be far from embrace;

Verse (5.) שָׁלַךְ (verb hiphil infinitive construct) “throw” also means “fling” or “cast” usually referring to human subject.⁵⁶ כָּנַס “gather” also use “collect” referring to gather people; or collect portions of harvest for priests and Levites; in its piel form it also refers to gather people together for punishment.⁵⁷ The verb חָבַק “embrace” or “clasp” - of persons in need of shelter; poor; are outcasts.⁵⁸ The verb רָחַק “be far” or “distant” from embrace, persons of neglect, abandon, be of utter absence; non-existence.⁵⁹

⁵³ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 510, 965.

⁵⁴ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 704, 903.

⁵⁵ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 955.

⁵⁶ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 510, 1020.

⁵⁷ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 488.

⁵⁸ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 287, 510.

⁵⁹ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 510, 934.

*a time to seek, and a time **to destroy**;*

a time to keep watch, and a time to throw away;

The verse (6.) verb בִּקֵּשׁ “seek” to find, to “secure” and also to “take one’s life.”⁶⁰

אָבַד “lose” by many English translations but it also means “perish”, “die”, of individuals, emphasis is placed on mortality; and also be exterminated – judgment for sin of Israel, other nations.⁶¹

a time to tear, and a time to sew together;

a time to be silent, and a time to speak;

Verse (7) דָּבַר to “tear” usually of rending of garment. Symbolic act in grief, tear away mark of leprosy; tear away sovereignty.⁶² The action of the verb is also a sign of resistance, conflict and opposition to the powerful. The term חָשָׁה to “be silent” also “inactive”, “still”; keeping silence at iniquity; “neglect to speak” is an indication of absence of moral or spiritual values. Both dichotomies in this verse indicate a form of opposition.⁶³ דָּבַר to “speak” with persons where it is rendered concerning or against hostility. The sense here is that of rising up to be heard, to speak against aggression, oppression; or criticism of those in control of power.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 134, 510.

⁶¹ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 1510.

⁶² Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 510, 902.

⁶³ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 364, 510.

⁶⁴ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 180, 510.

a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

The last verse of the poem (v8) regards אהבה to “love”, as affection both “pure and impure”, “divine and human.”⁶⁵ The word שנא (śn‘) translated as “hate” is often associated to the hate towards “sexual revulsion” as to a harlot. It is also associated with the hate of wickedness and idolatry.⁶⁶ The term מלחמה for “war” שלום for “peace” Judah is wholly carried captive; safety, soundness, in body; welfare, health, prosperity.⁶⁷

1.8 Tensions within the text

Section 3.7 reveals opposition and contradictions within Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8, where the first verse separates itself from the poem not only as a disclaimer statement from divine inspiration with “under the heavens”, but it also isolates itself from the poem in verse 2-8 as part of a unit. Although contrary to popular opinion that 3:1-8 or 3:1-9 is a complete unit, the abrupt change in style and content of the unit 2-8 indicates a different purpose for its inclusion. Why would there be a change of style? Why would the writer want to isolate the passage from the rest of the book? Apart from his repetitive cry of vanity, the plot of Ecclesiastes is scattered until all of a sudden an orderly passage, a poem which on face value has not much meaning that is coherently related to the previous and following verses, but a beautiful sonnet. If Hebrew wisdom and ANE tradition were concerned with order in life, the lack of an orderly structure of

⁶⁵ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 12, 510.

⁶⁶ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 510, 971.

⁶⁷ Brown-Driver-Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (2007), 1022.

Ecclesiastes, I argue, is indicative of the writer and the book's context, hence his negative frame of mind we see in his writing. The imbalance in the dichotomies in the poem also shows that things in the background were 'out-of-sync' with the norms of life. What Qoheleth is pointing to as the totality of life is conspicuously not in order.

1.9 Postcolonial Reading of the Text

An important component of postcolonial theory is called 'binarism' as mentioned in the beginning of the paper. In the poem it holds the key to a unified message in the passage as well as the book. The ambivalence between the oppositions named in the text 3:2-8 and throughout the book such as life and death, wisdom and folly, enjoyment and toil, pleasure and pain, love and hate, war and peace.

Imperial 'binarism' is often associated with movement in one direction – always that of colonizer to colonized, explorer to the explored, and from surveyor to the surveyed. However, with postcolonial identity arising out of ambivalent spaces of the colonial encounter, the change, therefore, becomes not one-directional. It becomes transcultural, with a significant circulation of effects back and forth between the two, for an engagement with the colonies became an increasingly important factor in the imperial society's constitution and understanding of itself.

The language and mood of the passage is very offensive and dominating that one is bound to read over and over in search of a satisfactory explanation, being thrown back and forth by the text just as Qoheleth was thrown back and forth in his search for wisdom.

The imbalance in the binary oppositions in 3:2, identifies a dominant imperial directive in "to bear children" and an insignificant colonial opposition "to die", as well

as “to be planted” and “to be uprooted” indicates no resistance from the colonized. Qoheleth highlights that both the time to give and preserve life and the time to destroy and end life, are not controllable events in the context of his people, neither by them and nor due to divine intervention or control. This implies that another authority but not God is in control - the imperial power.

To “be silent” or keeping silence at iniquity; “neglect to speak” indicates an absence of moral or spiritual values. Both dichotomies in this verse indicate a form of opposition. This is “speaking” with persons concerning or against hostility. The sense here is that of rising up to be heard, to speak against aggression, oppression; or criticism of those in control of power - the imperial power.

The passage closes with a message of “love” as affection both “pure and impure”, “divine and human.” The opposing term “hate” is more associated with hatred towards “sexual revulsion” as to a harlot. It is also associated with the abhorrence of wickedness and idolatry.

Perfect peace does not exist on earth. The parallel binary terms “war” and “peace” are related to one’s safety, soundness, in body; welfare, health, prosperity. This verse is arranged chiastically: love: hate: war: peace. Love and hate represent personal feelings while war and peace represent socio-political conditions. A last resort is encouraging by preparing the oppressed in the art of war, as a way towards realizing peace.

I use verse nine to provide a rhetorical relevant to the purpose of Qoheleth’s “What gain have the workers from their toil?” This provides a clue as to the purpose of the passage. Chapter 2 of the book ends with a similar question as to the meaning of toiling, and immediately reverts back to the same theme after the passage with the implication that after the discourse in 3:2-8, it is all vanity. When all factors ambivalent

and contradictions have come into the light of Qoheleth's context, in essence Qoheleth is saying, you must rise to discern the meaning of life, resist the corruption, injustices, inequalities, discrimination and immorality as all your strivings and toiling are meaningless, if you continue to be colonized by the imperial power. If you must toil, let it be for your enjoyment and be satisfied with the fruit of your labour. Qoheleth sees the meaninglessness of toiling in the sun all day only to be enjoyed by a total stranger.

For Qoheleth, he sees his people being forced to bear children, not at their own desire and their own time, but as demanded and required by the oppressors for their interest. He sees the power of the oppressor to establish (plant) his people wherever they choose and remove or destroy (uproot) them as they see fit. During the exile those that were taken included the leaders, the rich and strong and the wise. The ones that were left behind were the old and less able to do work or be productive to the empire (Assyrians).

Qoheleth sees that destruction and killing are part of the life of his people and is unavoidable, though healing and building are preferable. As a subject nation of the empire, one stands to deliver when there is a need for war. It is part of life for a colony of an empire. The message here is not concerned with ethical decisions of what constitutes a just war or the like. Qoheleth is merely asserting here that, in a world where people are not at liberty to decide what is right and wrong to do in life, there will be a time to kill.

Peoples' emotions of sorrow and joy are part of life where one is recognizable because of the other, yet are not under their control. To weep or to laugh, therefore, is not by choice but by default. Performing charitable work should be a freedom of

choice, but Qoheleth sees this also is out of his people's control, yet even doing what is perceived righteous is also out of his people's freewill.

The postcolonial reading has exposed an undermining ploy by the dominant culture of the empire (Persia) on the oppressed marginalized one (Israelites). The Israelite nationalistic pride and religious belief in YHWH their All-Powerful God, was used to drive Persian imperial ideologies, which Qoheleth is now able to comprehend. Parallel to the rebuilding of the wall and the temple in Ezra-Nehemiah's context, Qoheleth reveals to his people that all their work and effort is vanity and meaningless because their fate in this world is determined by the empire's social, economic and political climate of the day. All their toil is to serve the interests of the imperial power. Qoheleth's call for his people to enjoy the fruit of their labour, is a call to free themselves from the political ideologies. Qoheleth's description of their life under the imperial power in the poem sends a message for all to be aware and know that their efforts are in vain as they cannot enjoy the fruits of their labour.

CHAPTER 2

‘MOTUGA-AFA’ AND POSTCOLONIAL READING

In this chapter I will discuss the Samoan concept of ‘*Motuga-Afa*’ and its significance in the wisdom tradition of Samoa. I will expand on the definition and development of the postcolonial reading and its Binary aspect which is utilized in this paper. The contemporary Samoan issues relevant to this thesis will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

2.1 Samoan Concept – ‘*Motuga-Afa*’

‘*Motuga-Afa*’ literally means broken bits and pieces of ‘*afa*’ or sennit which are woven together providing binding or linking cords. ‘*Afa*’ is used to make a fishing net, to bind the wooden structures in the construction of the traditional Samoan ‘*fale*’ (house), binds the outrigger of a canoe to its hull, binds weapons, tools and other handicrafts.

‘*Afa*’ is the Samoan term for sennit¹ or the cord that is plaited from the fibres of coconut husk. ‘*Afa*’ is hand braided from dried coconut fibres from the husk of certain varieties of coconuts with long fibres, particularly the ‘*afa*’ palm tree (‘*niu’afa*’). “The collection and preparation of materials are done by the young men and women, but the actual plaiting of the ‘*afa*’ is mostly done by chiefs or the elderly.”²

¹ Sennit (also sinnet) is a type of cordage made by plaiting strands of dried fibre or grass. It can be used ornamentally in crafts, like a kind of macrame, or to make straw hats. Sennit is an important material in the cultures of Oceania, where it is used in traditional architecture, boat building, fishing and as ornamentation. See Hiroa, Te Rangi. *Vikings of the Sunrise*. (New Zealand: Whitecombe and Tombs Ltd., 1964), 27, <http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-BucViki-t1-front-d1-d1.html>. (Retrieved 21 August, 2010).

² Grattan, F.J.H. *An Introduction to Samoan Custom*. (New Zealand: R. McMillan, 1985) 164-5; ISBN 908712-13-8. <http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-GraIntr-N65654.html>. (Retrieved 14 August, 2010), (Accessed 20 April, 2013, 9.25pm.)

'*Motuga*' is a noun which is derived from the verb '*motu*' meaning break or snap.³ Samoans use the '*Afa*' "to bind together wooden crafts, lashes and keeps in beauty and shape the Samoan house ('*fale*'); binds and renders seaworthy the different vehicles and provides the figurative links, physical and spiritual between generations."⁴ The '*afa*' is more popularly used in making fishing nets and building fishing boats. Traditionally Samoans did not use nails to bind or join together handicrafts, Samoan housing, boats, fishing nets - they used '*afa*'.

The Samoan concept of '*Motuga-Afa*' is likened to the wisdom of the old people. The Samoans believe wisdom ('*tofa / moe*') is vested in their elders, their chiefs and orators. As opposed to modern thinking of wisdom being associated with the academically qualified, the Samoan Culture and wisdom defers to its old people; they are not to be considered obsolete or incompetent. As part of the knowledge capital of society, they always provide links, in history and traditions of the '*Aiga*' (family) and '*Nuu*' (village) just as the linking cords or '*afa*' flow from their aged and sometimes trembling fingers.⁵

Given the above details, we see a dichotomy in the naming of the concept of '*Motuga*' – broken bits and '*Afa*' – the linking cord or the mending cord. In this sense the concept as with all other also carries a negative connotation. The inference in the 'broken bits' suggests incompleteness and division as well as isolation. However Samoan Wisdom tradition is such that no '*motuga-afa*' is rendered useless and discarded. Each '*motuga-afa*' is woven together with others to make an '*afa*' useful and of much value. As discussed earlier, ancient Samoan wisdom never settled for a simple majority in its decision making. Resolution is taken only on a full consensus. If one or

³ George, B. Milner, *Samoan Dictionary*, (New Zealand: Pasifika Press, 1992), 150.

⁴ Aiono, F. Le Tagaloa, *Motuga Afa*, (Apia Samoa: Le Lamepa Press, 1996) in Foreword with no page number.

⁵ Le Tagaloa, *Motuga Afa*, (1996), in Foreword with no page number.

two are opposed to or uncertain of a majority agreement, the leaders of the forum would appeal for a unanimous decision. This prompts all members of the forum to provide their '*motuga-afa*' - a contribution to persuade, convince or argue with those opposing to conform to the majority for a unanimous decision, even if it takes the whole day. If at the end of the day, the opposing members are not convinced, the leaders will say, "*Ia moe le toa, taeao aena sau malamalama*" – "Let the warrior rest, tomorrow brings new light."⁶ This is usually experienced when the forum is faced with highly sensitive and serious matters. In this process each member is expected to consult the source of Ancient Samoan Wisdom.

2.2 Ancient Samoan Wisdom

To understand Samoan wisdom of the old, I sought Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese's⁷ explanation briefly on the source of wisdom according to traditional Samoan belief of *anapogi* and *moe manatunatu*:

"*Anapogi* literally refers to the rituals of the evening. It is a ritual of self-denial, prayer and meditation, i.e. the denial of food, company, sex and other distractions. The ritual often entailed isolation of self from the village, often in the still of the forest and evening, where the person can contemplate the harmonies and gain spiritual insight....*Moe manatunatu*....is a dream dialogue with ancestors and family gods which is available to man depending on the spiritual levels attained in his processes of *anapogi*. *Tofa* and *moe* are both terms associated with the *moe manatunatu*. Both mean sleep but *tofa* is applied to the wisdom of the chief, and *moe* the wisdom of the orator. Through *moe manatunatu* the gods and ancestors are able to assist the chief and orator not only in decisions concerning the self but also in decisions relating to family and community."⁸

⁶ The figurative language refers to a battle that is fought into the sunset and both sides agree to rest until the next day when it is daylight. For the Ancient Samoan wise, 'moe' means to retire to consult your God through prayer and fasting, to impart his knowledge and wisdom upon them. Come the next day, they are able to make wise decisions, for the good of their people.

⁷ Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese is the current Head of State of Samoa and a prolific Samoan writer of Culture and Traditions. Some of his works include *E Faagagaina oe e le Atua Fetalai*, *Talanoaga na loma ma Gaopoa* and others.

⁸ Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese and others, *Suesue Manogi*, (Samoa: The Centre for Samoan Studies NUS, 2009), 113.

Papalii Failautusi Avegalio affirms Tui Atua's belief that indigenous Samoan emphasis on knowledge relies mainly on spiritual balance. It maintains a respect and dialogue between humans and nature which is experienced in a lifelong enterprise through the dynamics of relationships especially with those of its stewards and leaders, the elders of '*āiga*' (family) through observations and interactions with '*alii*' (high chiefs) and '*tulafale*' (orator chiefs).⁹

Motuga *afa* is representative of the post-colonial period which Qoheleth's context would have been. As alluded to earlier, the implication is that during this time frame, several norms or the status quo of Qoheleth's environment and experience hence his society was broken either through influence or by force at the hands of the colonial regime. His existential moment now in post-exilic times, Qoheleth gathers these as his motuga afa and weaves or braids them ('*filiga-o-motuga afa*') to provide links for the broken cords of his experience with his people's present and future generations.

2.3 Brief History of Colonial Samoa

Samoa's colonial history started when it was occupied by Tonga. Apparently this was done through peaceful infiltration through trade and fishing expeditions. Around 1250c the ruler of Tongan descent became a dictator and Samoans rose up and drove all Tongans out, as a result.¹⁰

⁹ Papalii Failautusi Avegalio, *Reconciling Modern Knowledge with Ancient Wisdom: in Suesue Manogi*, (The Centre for Samoan Studies: 2009), 233.

¹⁰ Rev. S. Ella, *The war of Tonga and Samoa and origin of the name Malietoa*, (Journal of the Polynesian Society, Volume 8, No. 4, December 1899), 231-4; Another source with same dating is a very old book that I have which does not have details on it of authorship, printing and relevant details for citing. It is available for submission for inspection and verification if need be.

The Christian Missionaries arrived in the 1830 and colonized Samoa in the name of 'civilization'. They replaced Tagaloalagi the Samoan god of the heavens with YHWH.

German interest which lead to acquisition of Samoa was business related in 1855 when J.C. Godeffroy & Sohn established its transnational trading venture in the Pacific.¹¹ Tensions arising from conflicting interests of German traders, British and American businesses and plantation owners led to the first Samoan Civil War (1886 – 1894). Fought by Samoans, the Germans intervened on occasions that served their interests. The Americans and British disliked the German behaviour causing a confrontation amongst the three powers in 1887.¹²

The Second Samoan Civil War was caused by the dispute by the three powers over who should have control of the Samoan Islands. At the conclusion, the three colonial powers divided the Samoan Islands amongst themselves in 1899. The west islands, present day Samoa was given to Germany, the eastern islands, present day American Samoa to the United States, and the United Kingdom exchanged their interest with German territories in the Pacific and West Africa.¹³ Germany was in control of Samoa from 1900 to 1920 although the United Kingdom assigned New Zealand to take over from Germany control of Samoa in 1914.¹⁴ The appointment of New Zealand was

¹¹ <http://www.houseofpereira.com/j-c-godeffroy-sohn/> (Accessed on August 20th 2013)

¹² Robert L. Stevenson, *A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa*. (University of Hawaii Press, 1996, first published 1892). <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/536/536-h/536-h.htm#startoftext> (Accessed August 5th 2013)

¹³ George Herbert Ryden, *The Foreign Policy of the United States in Relation to Samoa*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), (Reprint by special arrangement with Yale University Press. Originally published at New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), 574; the Tripartite Convention (United States, Germany, Great Britain) was signed at Washington on 2 December 1899 with ratifications exchanged on 16 February 1900.

¹⁴ When war broke out in Europe in August 1914, Britain asked New Zealand to seize German Samoa as a 'great and urgent Imperial service'. New Zealand's response was swift. Led by Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Logan, the 1385-strong Samoa Advance Party of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force landed at Apia on 29 August. There was no resistance from German officials or Samoa's general population. Next day Logan proclaimed a New Zealand-run British Military Occupation of Samoa. The German flag was lowered and all buildings and properties belonging to the previous administration were seized. In the

official in 1920 by the League of Nations, and they were the ruling administration when the Samoan people stood against them due to injustices, mistreatment, lack of political representation and oppression.

During these colonial periods, some Samoan lands were taken and converted to freehold land, the colonial powers made laws which allowed them to exile Samoans from their lands and take away their chief (matai) titles due to petty offences. Samoans had no say in politics but were used to fight wars against each other in the interests of the colonial powers.

2.4 Postcolonial, Binarism, Ambivalence and Hermeneutical framework

Biblical studies place great focus on empires in many biblical accounts. Israel's history is that of domination by empires such as the Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks and Romans. As we have found in this research¹⁵, the context of Qoheleth - the socioeconomic, cultural and political – could only be established by placing the text in the context of the empire. Postcolonial theory explores also the element of politics especially those of imperial powers, which enhances understanding to theological, spiritual and historical aspects of these biblical narratives. Through this framework probing the text establishes the imperial intentions of the empire, and how the colonized relate or oppose them.¹⁶

Postcolonial lens is as described by Sugirtharajah - “more accountable and sensitive to ‘the other’”. Unlike other movements, postcolonial does not replace or offer

presence of officers, troops and ‘leading Native chiefs’, the British flag was raised outside the government building in Apia. 'Capture of German Samoa': <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/capture-of-samoa>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 20-Dec-2012, (Accessed 30-Jun-2013, 10.14pm.).

¹⁵ Refer to discussion on context from Section 1.2 to Section 1.5.

¹⁶ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Criticism*, 175-6.

a counter-imperial version¹⁷ to the colonial tensions in the Bible, but rather continue a dialogue with such tensions to learn from them in terms of theology practice and reconstruction that is Samoan oriented.

2.5 Samoan Contemporary Issues

The issues mentioned earlier in the Samoan social context indicate tensions between the state and the church highlighting a separation. Despite working towards the common good of its people, the tension exists due to their conflicting means and principles.

In the name of development, government has subscribed to WTO membership engaging in global markets, in free trade level-playing-field for all competitors. This however, is not exclusive to just tangible goods. It allows global companies to set up their offices, factories and bring their own people in and technologies. Samoa's accession to its WTO membership requires that they give up their status of being an LDC and with it all AID and interest free loans from global financial institutions. One of the driving motives behind this initiative is to be completely independent from foreign AID. It is an award of merit to the administration of the day by the World powers represented by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization. This stops lending money which brings minimal or no returns, to unproductive countries like Samoa whose resources are lying idle and well protected by its customs and cultural values. By luring such countries to become a member of the WTO the powerful nations are able to control and manipulate them to suit their interests. What is valuable in Samoa that warrants such a treatment? What does Samoa have to offer?

¹⁷ Paula Gooder, *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 177.

Samoa alone is not the cause. The Pacific region is made up of many island nations which themselves represent sovereign nations as Samoa. Together they form the Pacific Island Forum of sixteen countries. Each is represented in the United Nations as one sovereign nation which represents one vote just like the United States, Australia, New Zealand and all. The power nations like China, France, United States, Japan and others, value the votes of these nations. If sixteen votes are unanimous on who they support, they could certainly change the balance on decision-making.

AID was one of the incentives to sway over the votes of these small nations. Building projects like the Government buildings, Hospitals and Sports complexes, Seawalls, University complex and school buildings are some forms of the expression of that interest. Some of these were built from loans with no interest and a very lengthy repayment period, and some with no cost at all. However, there is no such thing as a free-lunch. What therefore is the cost to Samoa?

Over the years one of the main deterrents for foreign investors which has hindered the expansion of investment in Samoa, is the inability of foreign investors to secure land leases for lengthy periods which provides some form of assurance for a return on their investment. The majority of Samoan land is held under customary authority. This authority is vested in the high chief title (*matai*). Whoever holds the title has authority over the administration of the land.¹⁸ He decides who lives on which part of the land and for how long? If he is unhappy with that person for whatever reason, he has the authority to remove that person from the land. If two or more persons hold the chief title (*matai*) it makes the decision-making harder. If one chief agrees on a land issue and another disagrees, then only when the two or more parties agree, can the land be used. The issue there for the investors is securing a long-term lease that cannot be interrupted

¹⁸ Sharon Tiffany, *Politics and Land Dispute in Western Samoa*, (Apia: Government Printers; 1980), 177.

by the change of authority (*matai*). An example of this is the Royal Samoa Hotel at ‘Taumeasina’¹⁹. For over thirty years signed memorandums of understanding have been invalidated due to Government’s inability to secure a term lease or local financing to provide some comfort for the investor.

To take advantage of WTO’s perceived benefits, Samoa reviewed its land laws with the view of enabling its customary lands to be leased to investors for development. The result is “Samoa’s Land and Titles Registration Act 2008”, which adopts the Torrens system.²⁰ In this new system, the new law could permanently deprive customary land owners (in Samoa) of their land.”

2.6 Summary

‘*Motuga-afa*’ is a modest representation of a serious and sincere contribution of those deemed as leaders or decision makers. In Samoa this is found in its elders, its leaders and decision makers (‘*matai*’ – chiefs and orators). It would be fair to say in traditional Samoan society, only the wise sit in this council saying, “Here is my ‘*motuga-afa*’ that woven together with other ‘*motuga-afa*’ produces something good.” It produces mending or binding effect, as well as a link with “others” and from generation to generation of the Samoan wisdom.

¹⁹ Taumeasina is a small island off the outskirts of Apia to the east which can be accessed through Moataa and Vaiala villages. ‘Royal Samoa Hotel’ was the first name for the proposed for the project. Several proposals later, nothing has happened due to land lease issues and related financing preferences.

²⁰ Land registration system in which the government is the keeper of all land and title records, and a land title serves as a certificate of full, indefeasible, and valid ownership. Land Titles Registration Act 2008, s 9(1) and (2) [LTRA 2008]. The Act adopts the Torrens registration of title system and requires the registration of public land, freehold land and customary land leases and licences. It also allows the registration of customary land in respect of which judgment has been made by the Land and Titles Court. Ye, Ruiping. “Torrens and Customary Land Tenure: a Case Study of the Land Titles Registration Act 2008 of Samoa.” *Victoria U. Wellington L. Rev.* 40 (2009): 827.

The contemporary Samoan issues discussed above are mostly politically driven. Government is set on achieving its goals and United Nations prescribed goals, and the ill effects of them on its people, “is the role of the church” to prepare, counsel people and deal with them. Obviously the Government has subscribed to the interest of the “world powers” and what about the church’s role? Where is the church’s contribution?

CHAPTER 3

THE BIBLICAL WORLD AND CONTEMPORARY SAMOA

This chapter analogizes the biblical world and the Samoan contemporary world with a view to revealing forms of resistance to imperial social, cultural and political interests which have oppressed the Israelites in their own homeland.

The discussion on the biblical world in chapter one has revealed that Qoheleth is talking about the oppression and exploitation of his people. He reveals without specific reference to detail, the power plays of the imperial powers of the time which show the political ideologies of the empire. Although these issues are generally referred to throughout the book, the exegesis reveals Qoheleth's more intensified and purposeful resentment with the current status of his people's affairs. This coupled with the post-exile's disorder in the lives of his people – having to rebuild their community which although returned from the exile, they are without any leadership - and also having to deal with issues of identity against their own kind (Ezra-Nehemiah's purification of the Holy seed). Qoheleth, perhaps representative of the assumed form of leadership in Israel, has had to use an unprecedented approach to awaken his people to the realities of their existence, an urgent call for awareness and perhaps resistance. Affirming this disorder in Qoheleth's view is the absence of the 'Deuteronomic principle'. The corrupt and wicked are rewarded and the righteous are being oppressed.

The current issues of concern in Samoa that are discussed in chapter two resemble those of the biblical ones in Qoheleth's context. The aim therefore in this chapter is to find meaning from the biblical worlds of the text, to be able to inform a Samoan perspective with regard to its contemporary issues. In order to accomplish this, the two

worlds will be contrasted with a view to obtaining informed guidance for constructing a Samoan hermeneutics.

3.1 Text Meets Qoheleth in Context

In the world in front of the text we see Qoheleth's context literally as one of existential befuddlement. His repetitive "Vanity, All is Vanity" tone with what he sees, causes confusion for the reader prompting one to ask questions of the text as well as the context of its writer and his intentions. Questions like: What is the historical truth in this text? What purpose and scope is it written for?

The reality of Qoheleth's encounter with life at the top of the scale, as a rich, wise and old former king, has enabled him to see life more clearly in terms of the many possibilities, as well as the limitations of humanity. Qoheleth therefore knew the social, cultural and especially political environment of his people well. As a wise sage he understood also the wisdom traditions of his time and its central purpose of finding good for man. However, the foundation of all this is the need for individual and societal order, which for the Israelite is grounded in the Deuteronomic principle that equates wisdom with righteousness and folly with wickedness. This order is governed by the theology of retribution and "Fear God is Wisdom"

The discussion in the earlier chapters has unveiled ambivalence both within the book of Ecclesiastes as well as Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8. The tensions within Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 is one of economic frugality. As a subversive feature it undermines the colonizer's ideologies, which are seen to be aiding in the restoration of the social, economic and political development of the nation. The text reminds the individual and the nation that things are not normal. The order of things they are used to, has been turned upside down. It calls for another look at their life and a re-examination of the values of the life

they now lead. Who is benefitting from their labour? Who decides the timing of the events in their lives? Do they have a say in the affairs governing their lives? The text provokes such rhetoric to remind people that the oppositions in the text represent the 'good' and 'bad' in life. It indicates a disorder in their individual lives as well as their whole society. It is a reminder also to readers that there are always two or more sides to a story. What appears to be good to some people can be the direct opposite to others. Such is a cause for conflict and disorder especially when some are innocently unaware of the colonizer's ideologies and some, like the politicians who see the injustices yet they choose to be silent as they are beneficiaries of the spoils of corruption and the oppression of their own people.

For Qoheleth, the status quo of his society has been undermined. As such his tone is that of resentment and rage arising out of pain and infuriation from his continual experience with the corruption, injustices and therefore, the meaninglessness of his people's efforts in striving for the ultimate goal of life – to be happy. All these imbalances and turns in life have caused a state of chaos which has somewhat prompted a pessimistic impression of the human capacity and its perceived limitations. This has disrupted the structures of both individual and societal order.

It is inconceivable that God's intention for man was for oppression and deprivation of enjoyment and happiness. The exile was over as far as many were concerned as they had been returned to their homeland. The decentralization form of colonial rule used by the empire is in favour of both the post-exile Israelite community, as well as the imperial ideologies. With the absence of leadership – priests, kings and prophets – the wisdom sages such as Qoheleth assumes leadership in calling for awareness, resistance to colonial ideology, and to 'Fear God'.

3.2 Dialogue between Qoheleth's Desperation and Samoan Issues

The socio-political tensions in contemporary Samoa reveal a similar concern with Qoheleth's anxiety. Ambivalence can be seen in the text which emanates from the dominant voice of the empire's ideologies described by Qoheleth. The sage is well aware of his roots and traditions of his people. As discussed earlier, the Persian king was seen as the redeemer for Israel for he decreed their return from exile. Not only that, he gave them all that was needed to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem and the temple – so that they could worship their God.¹

The situation in Samoa as discussed earlier outline many similarities. The global powers which granted Samoa its independence in 1962 are the same ones pushing for the 'one global village economy' where the big powers, the rich countries, hold the advantage over the poorer and less resourced countries. WTO membership entails very similar ideologies as in Qoheleth's existential view of the post-exilic Israelite society in the Persian era. The smaller country is entitled to the same rights as the bigger countries. The playing field is leveled as promised, but the sizes of the players are a great mismatch. Players can pick and choose who they play against, and you cannot say no to whoever wants to play with you. Playing gear and equipment are expensive and most probably cannot be afforded by the smaller nations, and the cost to travel elsewhere is substantial. The alternatives are to borrow from the bigger nations. The other is to mobilize labour (people) to work for other foreign investors in Samoa or abroad. In this way, the investor takes people to wherever they need them to work. They will need to learn the language, customs and all that is required by the investor. The result is that, Samoa may only afford to play in its own backyard and if its lands are leased to foreigners for hundreds of years, then Samoans will become foreigners in their

¹ Ezra 5:1-17 'Restoration of the Temple Resumed'; Ezra 6: 1-22 'The decree of Darius'.

own land, but they may not even know it as they stand to lose their language, inheritance in lands and titles – their Samoan identity. There are many educated and powerful, who are aware of these impacts, but their voices are like the wind - they come and go as they please but do not stay or say anything. The voice of Samoan wisdom has been silenced by a two thirds majority of a parliamentary party system. The party holding the executive arm of government holds more than three-quarters majority. The order of traditional Samoan life is under threat of being in chaos.

3.3 Church as a Spirituality Resistance

There is a responsibility of the church to its people to protect them spiritually. More specifically the Christian church must realize that this new form of colonialism is not exclusive to the secular world. The government has already changed its constitution to allow freedom of religion which allows any type of religion to enter and practice in Samoa, and not just Christianity. Traditional Samoan wisdom when seeking a unanimous resolution, turn to their god for intervention through imparting his wisdom upon them. The church must not be complacent but be proactive in its ministry. If people are steadfast in their faith in God, it is the greatest resistance and defense.

As a theological student of the most influential and biggest Church in Samoa, I am confident that the Samoan people's lives revolve around their Church. There is no doubt that all Samoans in the country belong to some religion. The vast majority of the people are in the Christian classifications or denominations. Only a small minority belong to non-Christian religions. The Christian Churches therefore holds the potential of power in terms of numbers, should there be a dire need for a concerted resistance to the injustices in society. Church leaders and members must be aware of this potential. The Church's role within the judicial arm of the government function is probably at the

end of the line. However, its potential of power is very authoritative. All members of parliament are prominent Church members and some are authoritative Church leaders. The spiritual side of any human being holds great influence in one's decision making. This decision making includes all people and becomes a very powerful means of resistance when united in the same values and morals. In the language of the Churches themselves, this unity calls for all denominations to forego their differences and their desire to maintain their status quo and particularity. For the Church to be an effective means of resistance, there is a need for an ecumenical stance to recognize unity in God. If the Church members emphasize their own denomination's particularity, any attempt at an organized resistance will no doubt be demolished.

In a more personal way, the Church's influence in the morality of its people, is in itself an effective form of resistance through its ability to strengthen people's morals in order to resist falling victim to the effects of globalization and WTO. This is perhaps a most warranted form as the adverse impacts of globalization are in effect, only become destructive due to the person's choice – whether good or bad, moral or immoral.

The Church needs to be proactive rather than reactive to the changes that are inevitable in the wake of globalization and its commercialization effects. In the words of Rogate Mshana, of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Economic Justice program, speaking on behalf of the WCC's delegation to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in Brazil earlier this year,

“We are witnessing the development of a spirituality that supports the powers responsible for the current unjust and unsustainable process of corporate globalization. For that reason, we need to recover the long tradition of a Christian spirituality critical of power. It is a spirituality which has given those without power the strength and courage to oppose those who abuse it”²

² <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/spirituality-of-resistance-key-theme-of-wcc-s-contribution-to-world-social-forum> (Accessed on August 15th 2013) 2.00pm.

Conclusion

The postcolonial reading of Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 has revealed an undermining and subversive ideology of the dominant culture of the Persians, on the marginal one, the Israelites.

The discussions in Sections 1.5 and 1.9 support the argument that Qoheleth's writings had purpose which was directly related to his context. He was a wise sage and not a pessimist or optimist as viewed by past and present scholarship. Seow's and Brown's work on recognizing the favoured dating used in this thesis also enables the juxtaposing of the book's content with the historical events of the time. Their work brings to light new perspective regarding Qoheleth's motive and attitude. Although this new development has not compelled a consensus amongst scholarly views, the linguistic and archaeological evidence supporting this background finds firmer grounding than a conceptualized fictional autobiography of Qoheleth.

Why is Qoheleth so negative? In retrospect, the Israelites believed that the king of Persia, who decreed their release to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple and worship their God, was their saviour sent from God. The Persians, however, used this Israelite reverence to YHWH - in their traditions of 'religious purity' and 'purifying the Holy seed' - and twisted it to their advantage. This is where the ambivalence exists. The relationship between the dominant empire and the marginalized is ambivalent because Israel as the colonized is not in complete opposition to the Persian rule although it destabilizes the Israelite society. This describes a mixed loyalty for the Israelites as they would want to honor their God, but they are also obliged to follow the rules and laws of the Persian who gave them release from exile. It was a life of trying to live by two

cultures - one with their own traditions and religion, but also to comply with the imperial power by living their culture as well. The colonizer in this case is not seen by its subjects as an oppressor and therefore, do not see its ideologies that are destabilizing their society. The ambivalence in this relationship has caused mixed attitudes and behaviours disrupting the order of Israelite society. The people have become disobedient of God's law because they are obliged to give back service to their saviour from the exile. Consequently, the wicked and corrupt benefit and prosper from this new system, while the righteous suffer in the socioeconomic and political arena.

For Qoheleth, the Israelite Wisdom tradition and the disorderly life of the individual, as well as the Israelite society, are not due to God's absence from the lives of his people, but the people's failure to comprehend their existentialism. The key indicator of abnormality in the individual and societal order of life is the obvious reversal of the Deuteronomic code. This abnormality in the order of Israelite life is represented by the dichotomies in Qoheleth's message of opposites – the positives and negatives, the imbalances and incongruities of their existence are the facts of life - which only the wise are able to comprehend, the in-depth connotation of their existential encounters in life. Qoheleth represents the order of life of Israel in that, "Fear God is wisdom". The wise only have the understanding to make sense of these dichotomies to unfold the totality of life 'under the heavens'. The thesis therefore maintains that such is the contribution from Qoheleth to his people's dilemma and the ambivalence in their existence. It is the duty of wisdom to do the right and to correct the wrong in reverence of God.

In contrasting the Biblical discourse with the Samoan contemporary issues discussed earlier in this paper, we see a great resemblance in the relationship of Samoa with the WTO's purpose. There is ambivalence created and embedded in the values of

Samoa society during her long colonial history. However, there is a different form of colonialism which is becoming inevitable with Samoa's accession to WTO membership, which becomes fully attained in January 2014.

“The stated aim of the World Trade Organization (WTO) is to promote free trade and stimulate economic growth. The actions and methods of the World Trade Organization evoke strong oppositions. Among other things, the WTO is accused of widening the social gap, between rich and poor it claims to be fixing.”³ One of the criticisms of the WTO is that it does not guarantee impartial management of the “global economic system”. There is a systematic bias with arrangements with rich nations and corporations, exploiting smaller countries with less negotiation power. The rich and powerful still maintain high import duties and quotas but the lesser developed countries have been reduced. They still maintain high protection of agricultural products in the rich countries while poorer ones are forced to open their markets to all. The ‘TRIPs’ agreement puts restrictions on the poor countries from the use of technology from other countries locally for production of medicines and other products.

Moreover, from whatever culture or traditions one views from, the allowing of strangers free access into your land and giving them uninterrupted authority to use and dwell on it for lengthy periods of time, is catastrophic. It brings physical and financial ruin to one's society. When land is leased for a hundred years, one is effectively displaced, banned, evacuated – exiled – from it for a hundred years.

Emically, the Israelites see the benefit in their toil and their service to the empire. The logic to them is that, serving the empire is honoring God as it was the decree of the king of Persia that returned them to their homeland. Etically, it is foolish

³ William R. Cline, "Conclusion" in *Trade Policy and Global Poverty*, (U.S.A: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2004), 264.

and therefore, a meaningless life as it is an imperial ideological mechanism to manipulate the loyalty of its subjects, and reap its economic benefits. Israel being a vassal nation with virtually no formal leadership is ideologically restructured to form small states or colonies for economic purposes. For Qoheleth, the imperial ideology has destabilized the order of Israelite life and reversed the basis of their covenantal relationship with God. I argue therefore, that Qoheleth's purpose is to exhort his people to see that life is meaningless, for they serve the interests of the empire and not God. Thus, "the end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil." (12: 13-14)

For Samoa, its colonial experience and postcolonial living for fifty years has formed itself into a hybrid society. In it, the Samoan ideology was, 'to take advantage of our disadvantage'. As an LDC, it enjoyed a postcolonial lifestyle largely funded by foreign AID. It also enjoyed its independence in making its own rules and boasting in its uniqueness in culture, location, peace and tranquility. The downside is that it is not catered for all people. Some still prefer the open Samoan '*fale*' (house) although they have to have a European styled house. Some that cannot afford a European lifestyle have no choice but to be satisfied with the traditional Samoan lifestyle. The benefits of postcolonial living under WTO are most likely to find their way into the elite few with means to compete with foreigners economically. The rest stand to lose their inheritance in terms of land and identity to the ideologies of this powerful organization. Why? Leaders, politicians obviously think postcolonial life contains the good that they must provide for their people. Traditional leaders ('*matai*') have been silenced by the two-thirds majority of parliamentary vote, which is an indicator of the privileged few enjoying the status quo of postcolonial living. Where is the church's '*motuga-afa*'? Is

the church in danger of being satisfied with the postcolonial living causing its voice to be 'unheard'?

As long as Samoa is enjoying the postcolonial life, its beliefs and values will continue to change and with rapid ease. The attractions and pleasures of this postcolonial 'hybrid' society borne from its colonial experience, will continue to blind Samoa of the ideologies of the new colonial experience, especially if it believes it to be the best 'good' for its people.

Glossary

Afa	<i>Sennit</i>
Aiga	<i>Family</i>
Faa-faletui	<i>A meeting to seek unanimous understanding on an issue/matter</i>
Fale	<i>Samoaan house (open)</i>
Filiga	<i>Braiding, plaiting, weaving</i>
Matai	<i>Samoaan high chief or orator</i>
Moe	<i>Wisdom of high chief</i>
Motuga-afa	<i>Broken parts and pieces of Sennit</i>
Nuu	<i>Samoaan Village</i>
Soalaupule	<i>seeking a unanimous consensus through exchange of logical arguments</i>
Tagaloalagi	<i>Ancient Samoaan god of the heavens</i>
Tofa	<i>Wisdom of orator</i>

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