A WIDOW'S WORTH:

A *TAULAGA* READING OF THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH'S DEED IN 1 KINGS 17:8-16

A Thesis Presented to the

Faculty of the Malua Theological College

Apia, Samoa

In Partial Fulfilment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Divinity

By

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August 12, 2016

ABSTRACT

There are many stories in the Bible that portray the manifestation of God's power through His chosen servants. When reading these stories, we tend to focus our attention on the main character, while neglecting the minor characters; their deeds and the roles they play in the story. Such is the story in 1 Kings 17:8-16, where God's miraculous power is revealed through His prophet Elijah, by maintaining the supply of flour and oil for a widow and her son. However, what tends to be neglected and often fades into the distance, is the offering made by the widow to Elijah. In an attempt to bring out the neglected widow's offering, I seek to construct a *taulaga* hermeneutic to re-read 1 Kings 7:8-16, which begs the question: Is there more to the widow's deed than just sustaining a hungry prophet?

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is approximately 15,000 words in length, excluding the bibliography, has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award, at this or any other academic institution.

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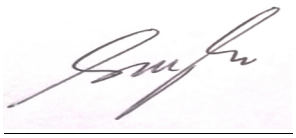
Signed: 

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memories of my late parents,

Peseta Sinave Isara and Miriama Galuvao-Isara,

who have always wanted one of

their children to be a *faifeau*.

You are forever in my heart.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first of all, thank God for giving me the strength to complete this undertaking. There were times when I felt discouraged, but His presence permitted me to complete this task. *Viia lau Afio le Atua.*

I would like to give a special thank you to my supervisor, Mr Brian Kolia, for his guidance and patience which has ensured that this project is completed. *Faafetai tele i lau susuga i le faiaoga.* I extend my gratitude to the Principal, Rev. Maafala Lima and his good lady Lalokava Lima, and also to all the teachers that has assisted me in one way or the other. Thank you all very much.

I would also like to thank my family and friends who have assisted me and have contributed to our stay in Malua. Lau Afioga Peseta Cecilia Sio-Ah Leong, *faafetai i lou alofa faa-tina.* To Peseta Tiumalu and wife Judy, and Alapati and Aunty Tuaoitau Pupi. Thank you for being there for us. I also would like to make mention of my sister Elita Tooala, Rev. Mofate & Aliitasi Fuimaono and family, as well as Afioga Aumua Ming and his good lady Fiti Leung Wai. Your assistance and prayers have enabled us to persevere through these hard times.

I would like to thank my aulotu, CCCS Peteleema Fou at Vaitele Fou for your prayers and support. To my Spiritual parents, Rev. Iosefa Afutiti and his good lady Tina Afutiti. Thank you for all that you have done for me and my family over the years. *Faafetai tatalo. Malo le tapuai.*

I can not forget the prayers and support of my parents-in-law, Lealaitagomoa Afatia and Sipaea. *Faafetai i lo oulua titi-faitama.* To my brothers and wives - Galuvao Uili & Mutaaga, Peseta Sio & Lusavaina, and Oloapu Tanielu & Faimafili along with their children. I thank you for standing beside us, and going out of your way to help me

and my family. *O la le Poto, o le uo mo aso uma, a o le uso mo aso vale. Faafetai le fai uso lelei.* To all our families near and afar, thank you all for your prayers. *E le sili le ta'i i lo le tapua'i.*

Last but not the least, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my family. To my children, Sinave Neal Roben, Opapo Jay, Miriama Callydora and Afatia MJ, thank you for your support. Just having you around gives me joy in life. Finally, to my dearest wife, Tupe. Words are not enough to express how lucky I am, to have you as my best half. Despite the highs and lows of life, as well as the demanding responsibilities of our calling, you are always there to encourage, support and guide me. You are truly my rock and my strength, and the pillar of my life. You are all forever in my heart.

Ia i le Atua pea le viiga e faavavau!

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANE	-	Ancient Near Eastern
BDB	-	Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon
CCCS	-	Congregational Christian Church Samoa
JSOT	-	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSupp	-	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series*
NICOT	-	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	-	New International Version of the Bible
NKJV	-	New King James Version of the Bible
NRSV	-	New Revised Standard Version
NT	-	New Testament
OT	-	Old Testament
WBC	-	Word Biblical Commentary

INTRODUCTION

The widow's offering in 1 Kings 17:8-16 is a fascinating tale. The unlikely rendezvous of two incongruous characters, presents a unique situation where the widow of Zarephath makes her bizarre offering. The weaving of all these elements together makes for an uncanny reading experience. It reminds me of my Christian lifestyle; dealing with church offerings on a constant basis, and being anxious of whether I have enough or not. This is the reality for many Samoans who make monetary offerings to God and the church. It is done with the spiritual understanding that what is given is for God. Since the Samoan culture is based on the concept of reciprocity, there is an underlying belief that what is offered to God will be reciprocated with His blessings. In Samoa, we call this *taulaga*: a word that exhibits this spirit of giving our all.

For the purpose of illustration, I draw our attention to an experience I had at my village congregation. A certain young man in our congregation made a unique offering by including cents within his offering. It is custom in Samoan churches for donations to be recorded and announced at the conclusion of church services. As opposed to giving a whole figure of say $10.00, $20.00 or $50.00, the man would deliberately donate amounts like $10.30, or $20.50, or $50.10. This caught the attention of our Minister who instructed the committee members not to announce the cents component of his offering, but to put the cents in the offering basket. This angered the young man, as he argued that the church should have acknowledged his offering in total, as he was giving all that he had to God. Interestingly enough, he used the story of the widow of Zarephath to support his argument. He said that the widow gave all she had to feed the man of God. The Minister explained that cents did not constitute a whole thing, as they were but a fraction of a dollar.

Now going back to the story of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:8-16, it enlightened me about the widow's deed. In spite of her hospitality to the prophet, the widow is largely an anonymous character. She had no name, she had no husband, she did not have much going for her and her son. Yet this man from our church pointed to her as an ambassador for generosity. She had typified the spirit of offering all that one had, for the glory of God. Ironically, I had come to the realization, that I had not thought as such prior, and it embarrassed me that I had succumbed to androcentric tendencies in reading. I had neglected the widow's deed as nothing more than a good deed by a woman to a more significant man. This thesis is somewhat of a mission to right the wrong, and seek an alternative way of reading this story, in light of my experience. I inquire through the hermeneutical lens of *taulaga* as I seek to acknowledge the significance of how a person's deed magnifies one's character.

As a result, I raise some important questions that should help guide this research. What was the significance of Zarephath in this story? How did Elijah know that he was with the right widow? Was the widow's response a sign of reluctance on her behalf? Is giving as an act of obedience, classified an offering? Is there a significance of the characters in this story? We refer to our offerings made in church as *taulaga*. Is the widow's offering a *taulaga*?

These questions will be pursued in a bid to bring out the significance of the widow in the context of the story. The intension of the paper is to construct an alternative way of reading the story of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:8-16, by way of a *taulaga* hermeneutic. It is a response to the issue of neglected voices in the text. This is therefore an exercise in Reader Response Criticism.

This thesis will be divided into three chapters. In chapter one, the focus will be to revisit the story in 1 Kings 17:8-16, and to construct a hermeneutic to read the story. Chapter two is twofold. I outline my methodology for reading the text, and then use the reading method to exegete the text. In the third and final chapter, I will discuss the implications of this reading, for other stories of neglected voices, whilst concluding with theological reflections stemmed from this *taulaga* reading.

CHAPTER 1

THE NEGLECTED WIDOW AND HER DEED

1.1 Introduction

I begin my inquiry into the woman's deed in 1 Kings 17:8-16. I find that her generous deed to Elijah does not seem to receive the attention it truly deserves, which is probably the reason why her character does not receive that much attention as well. I will discuss this point before embarking on a quest to develop a hermeneutic that will help me read the deed made by the widow of Zarephath to Elijah. In developing this hermeneutic, I will find perspective in the Samoan word *taulaga*, as an alternative reading of the Zarephath widow's deed.

1.1.1 The Widow's Deed in 1 Kings 17:8-16

The story about Elijah and the widow from Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:6-18 is one of three separate narratives in chapter 17 connected by the theme of death, with the first two, including 8-16, centering on the problem of water and food.[1] It is also located within the context of chapters 17 to 19, which have as their main theme "the battle for the establishment of the exclusive worship of Yahweh in Israel against the forces of Baal."[2] Baal worship made its way into Israel when their king, Ahab, married Jezebel, the Sidonian princess from the land of Phoenicia. It was common to have arranged

[1] Raymond B. Dillard, *Faith in the face of Apostasy: The Gospel according to Elijah & Elisha*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1999), 15. The three narratives in 1 Kings 17 referred to above are 1-7; 8-16 and 17-24.

[2] Robert L. Cohn, "The Literary Logic of 1 Kings 17-19," Journal of Biblical Literature 101, no. 3 (1982).

cross-border royal marriages for political and economical interests.[3] Joseph Blenkinsopp in his work titled, *A History of Prophecy in Israel*, states that this marriage was arranged by Ahab's father, Omri, who reigned over Israel for seven years.[4] During this time, the accession of the kings to the throne of Israel was marked by a bloody-path of murder and usurpation. The heirs to the throne were killed by army commanders who then claimed the throne for themselves. It is therefore logical to see why Omri wanted a foreign enforcement to guarantee his son's accession to the throne and to make him king for as long as possible.[5]

But this intermarriage between the royal families of Israel and Tyre (Sidon) led to the opening up of Israelite borders for the Phoenician religion to enter Israel. William E. Barnes in his work, *The Two Books of the Kings* believes that although Ahab worshiped Baal, he did not totally give up worshiping the God of Israel.[6] However, this showed Ahab's unfaithfulness to the Lord as the sole God of Israel. The three chapters from 17 to 19 therefore underscore God's rejection of Baal worship. In the context of

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[3] Victor P. Hamilton, "Marriage (OT and ANE)" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary: Vol 4, K – N*, David Noel Freedman, ed, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 562.

[4] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel: Revised and Enlarged*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996 [1983]), 93. This is contrary to verse 23 of 1 Kings 16, which states that Omri "reigned for twelve years, six of them in Tirzah". However, the beginning of this same verse states that Omri started his reign over Israel "in the thirty-first year of king Asa of Judah". If this is to be read together with verse 29, where it says that Ahab began his reign over Israel "in the thirty-eighth year of King Asa of Judah", then that leaves only seven years for Omri's reign; not twelve.

[5] Gale A.Yee, "Jezebel" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary: Vol 3, H – J*, David Noel Freedman, ed, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 848.

[6] William E. Barnes, *The Two Books of the Kings*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1908), 140.

the *Deuteronomistic History*, this adds to the explanation of Israel's woes and why they have fallen to exile.[7]

To recap the story, we find at the beginning of Chapter 17, the prophet Elijah being summoned by God to proclaim His judgment upon King Ahab, with the announcement of a three-year drought. As the scourging drought took place, Elijah, whose message had marked him enemy of the state, was instructed by God to hide himself by the Wadi Cherith, a stream or brook located to the east of the river Jordan. During his stay at the brook, ravens brought him food. Then, as the brook was drying up, God's word came to Elijah to leave the brook, and go and live in Zarephath, a land belonging to Sidon, in the heart of Baal territory. There, God had commanded a widow to feed him.[8]

Now looking at this story, 1 Kings 17:8-16 is a story full of ironies, which makes for intriguing reading. Ironies are literary techniques that are very deliberate in their use. They tend to communicate certain messages, sometimes obvious, and other times less obvious. I turn our attention to four (4) ironies in this passage, which have been interwoven to create this story.

1. ***There will be no rain in the land where people worship the god of rain:***

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[7] Cf. Noth, Martin. *The Deuteronomistic History, JSOTSup 15* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981). The work of Noth and subsequent authors such as Rudolph Smend and Frank Moore Cross have been instrumental in explaining this theory. Due to the limitations of this thesis however, I will not have time to discuss in light of the Deuteronomistic context. Nevertheless, given the theory's prominence in biblical studies (more so in the mid 20th century), it is important to realise that these books (Deuteronomy – 2 Kings excluding Ruth) can also be interpreted within such a theoretical framework.

[8] "1 Kings 17:8" in The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 253.

After Ahab's marriage to Jezebel, he not only brought home a wife, but a new god and a new religion. As a result, people of his kingdom, Israel, worshiped this new god. Elijah was sent by God to "remind Ahab that Yahweh, not Baal, is God of Israel."[9] Barnes goes further and asserts that Elijah's announcement that there will be no rain "was a direct challenge to Baal, the Canaanite god of storm and rain."[10] The irony tends to target the people and its leadership, that the god that they are now worshiping who is known to be the god of storm and rain, is being challenged with the provision of the very thing that he is god of.

2. Fed by birds who do not feed their own young:

After the announcement of the word of God, Elijah was instructed to hide in the Wadi Cherith, a brook in the eastern border of the land of Israel. While in hiding, God sent ravens to bring food to Elijah. This is an irony of nature, because these birds, as in Job 38:41, are known to be very selfish, in that they do not feed their young. But now, they are bringing food to feed Elijah.

3. Living in the land of the enemy:

As the brook in which Elijah was hiding was starting to dry up, the word of the Lord came to Elijah, to go to Zarephath in the region of Phoenicia, to live there. This is the very region where Jezebel, the King Ahab's queen, is from. It is ironic in the sense that Elijah was sent to live in the land where Queen Jezebel is from, who is seeking Elijah to be persecuted.

4. Sustained by a widow:

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[9] Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2015), 208.

[10] William E. Barnes, *The Two Books of the Kings*, 142.

The final irony comes in the form of the widow that was instructed by God to sustain the prophet Elijah. The widow would be the last person in that society to be entrusted with such a task. In the Old Testament, widows were vulnerable members in society and were viewed with shame and reproach.[11] It was even more difficult if a widow had a child that was dependent on her, for she also had to take care of the child as well. They were "the poorest of all society."[12] And yet, in our story, God has instructed the widow, of all the people, to sustain the prophet Elijah.

Of these ironies, the last irony is most intriguing in my reading, as it highlights the magnitude of the widow's service to the prophet. A woman who had little; had no husband to support her; struggled to support her only child; and yet was asked to provide sustenance to a third person. I therefore seek to inquire of this deed by the widow and its significance in the context of the Elijah narrative.

1.1.2 Is the Widow's Offering a *Taulaga*? The Need for a *Taulaga* Reading

The widow's generous deed to Elijah is a rather interesting act. She did not offer it silently; but rather, she hesitated and revealed to Elijah her situation. She and her son were on the brink of starvation. However, Elijah seemed unmoved by her predicament and instructed her to give what she had to him first, before making something for her and her son. This part of the story derives the core of the problem for my reading experience. Was the offering done from her free will, or was it done as a silent

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[11] J. D. Douglas and R. V. G. Tasker, "Widow," ed. D. R. W. Wood et al., *New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 1239.

[12] Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, 2nd ed, vol. 12, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Inc, 2003), 216–217.

submission to a command? If it was in submission to a command, would that constitute an offering? It is unusual to call the widow's deed an 'offering' but from a Samoan perspective, her deed could be seen as one, and this is where I seek to probe deeper.

To try and answer these questions, it is essential for this paper to explore the concept of offering as *taulaga* the Samoan word for offering. The discussion will then lead to the development of a hermeneutic based on the concept of *taulaga*, in order to re-read 1 Kings 17:6-18. In constructing the *taulaga* hermeneutic, I will discuss an etymological deconstruction of the word, and align such an understanding, with a reading that uproots the magnitude of the Zarephath widow's *taulaga*, from within the text.

1.2 What is *Taulaga*?

The word *taulaga* is closely related to the act of "Giving" in the traditional Samoan context.[13] In traditional ceremonies such as funerals, weddings and title bestowments, people share, exchange and give out gifts. Giving, therefore, has always been a part of the Samoan way of life before Christianity arrived. This culture of giving connects *taulaga* to the four traditional Samoan Sacrificial Offerings of *Faasao, Ava* or *Auala, Sua* and *Sala*.[14]

The first of these sacrifices is called *Faasao*. Hunters in the pre-Christian era dedicated their first catch of the first day of hunting to the god of the forest, *Manuvao*,

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[13] Alo Pita, "The Widow's Offering and Jesus' Response (Mark 12:41-44): A Comparative Study to Giving from a Samoan Ecclesiastical Perspective"; BD Thesis; Malua Theological College, 2010, 4.

[14] Denny Epati, "Significance of Sacrifice in Anciet Israel and in Samoa today: A Comparative Study", BD Thesis, Malua Thoelogical College, 2003, 40.

to invoke its blessings and protection upon them. This sacrifice consisted of burning the whole animal, including the skin and carcass. Hence, the Samoan proverb, "*ia mua se faasao ia Manuvao*", or "the first catch should be dedicated to *Manuvao.*"[15]

The second is a form of *taulaga* sought to petition to a family deity for blessing. This comes in the form of "*Ava*" and/or "*Auala*". "The *Ava* ceremony is also known as the traditional Samoan worship or *lotu Samoa moni*."[16] The *ava* bowl is poured on the floor first before drinking, as homage to one's personal god, to solicit their wisdom and support during the meeting. Likewise the *taulaga* called *Auala* is performed during a funeral of a chief or his wife. The people performing this *taulaga* walk around the house where the funeral is taking place, chanting the words, "*tulouna le lagi; tulouna le lagi ma le lagi ma le lagi*".[17] *Lagi* is heaven. In the past, people believed that there were various levels of heaven, starting from the lowest heaven to the highest heaven where it was believed to be the dwelling place of *Tagaloalagi,* the supreme deity. The chant therefore, is to petition the occupants of the lower heavens to allow the new spirit to pass through to come near *Tagaloalagi*.

Thirdly, when people become ill, it was suspected that such illness was caused by a deity. The family of the sick prepares a *Sua*, which is an offering of food to the deity to implore its forgiveness, so that the sick can get well again. An example of this type

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[15] Denny Epati, "Significance of Sacrifice in Anciet Israel and in Samoa today: A Comparative Study", 2003, 40.

[16] Ibid 42.

[17] Ibid. A literal translation of this chant is: "We ask permission of the inhabitants of the different layers of heaven."

of sacrifice used to be practiced in the village of Matautu, Savaii, to *Tuifiti,*[18] the traditional deity worshiped by this village, where the sick person's family prepared a sua, usually a large pig and a fine mat, and took it to a specific place assigned for this purpose. The *taula* or priest, usually a descendant of the *Tuifiti,* handled and presented the offering.[19] After the sacrifice was presented, the pig was divided and distributed to the villagers, and the fine mat was usually presented to the highest-ranking Chief who represents the deity.

The fourth sacrifice is called the "*Sala*" where the sacrifice is made to atone a crime that was committed.[20] This is reflected in the story of the ancient Samoan King Malietoa Faiga and his son Poluleuligaga who offered himself to be sacrificed as atonement for two boys from Salega in Savaii who had committed a crime, who were about to be killed and eaten by the king. This is also the concept of *Ifoga*,[21] the Samoan act of showing remorse and sympathy for a crime committed to seek forgiveness.

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[18] One of the legends that I used to hear from my mother was how the tile of Tuifiti (Fijian King) came to Samoa. A Samoan man named *Tupaimatuna*, married the daughter of the Tongan King. Her name was *Laufafaitoga*. When she was pregnant, she wanted to go back to her family to give birth there to her first child. She left Samoa for Tonga, but a fierce storm drove their boat to Fiji, where she gave birth to her first child, *Vaasilifiti* (translated as "the boat that was blown to Fiji). The King of Fiji, the Tuifiti, took her for his wife, and had three children, *Ututauofiti, Legaaletuifiti*, and *Tauaofiti*. The Samoan man, *Tupaimatuna*, suspected that something has happened to his wife, so he set sail across the pacific in search of her, and found her in Fiji. He brought his wife and all her children back to Samoa, and lived in the village that is now called *Matautu* The eldest of the Fijian children, Ututauofiti, was given the title, Tuifiti by his father, and he carried this to Samoa. They were strong and fearsome, and they conquered the island of Savaii. Due to their heroic feats of war, the Tuifiti (their leader) was worshiped by the people of *Matautu* as a deity.

[19] Denny Epati, "Significance of Sacrifice", 43.

[20] Ibid, 44.

[21] Ibid, 45.

All forms of *taulaga* mentioned above involve giving of what is dear to a person, even to the extent of giving up one's life. This makes the concept of *taulaga* compelling in relation to the offering made by the widow, because of the nature of her offering, and the dire situation she and her son were in.

In light of the above-mentioned traditional *taulaga*, I now seek to define what *taulaga* means in a literal sense. According to *Pratt's Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language*, *taulaga* has the following meanings: "a sacred offering;" "an anchorage;" "the roost of a bat;" and "to endeavor to raise, as a swamped cause, or a conjured party."[22] All of these meanings enlighten this research. Therefore, it is worthwhile to explore them all.

The first meaning of a 'sacred offering,' is a generic use of the word, referring to any form of offering. The sacredness aspect adds a hierarchical classification to the offering made. This is why the word *taulaga* is used to refer to offerings made in church, because people believe that these offerings are made to God; hence making it sacred.

The second meaning of 'anchorage' is similar to that of a wharf, where boats and ships anchor. The root word for this is *taula*, meaning anchor. The wharf at Matautu in Apia is referred to as the *taulaga o vaa*, or the "anchorage of ships." Since trading ships called in and traders set up their business around it, it gave rise to the city of Apia, which is now called the capital city of Samoa. This is also another meaning of the word t*aulaga* in the modern era; it refers to a city, or the capital city of a country.

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[22] George Pratt, "Taulaga" in *Pratt's Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language* (Apia, Samoa; Malua Printing Press, 1911), 300.

The meaning 'roost of a bat' points to where bats or *pe'a* congregate. It also refers to their nesting place, which is often called a *taulaga-pe'a*.

Finally, the meanings 'to endeavor to raise', or 'a swamped cause', or 'a conjured party' portray a raising action, of something that is raised from a lower position. It is usually used to refer to someone who is attempting to raise something up or pulling something out.

1.2.1 *Taulaga* in the Modern Samoan Context

As a sacrifice, *taulaga* can be defined as an act of offering something or someone precious, to a deity.[23] The word *taulaga* is used to refer to offerings and sacrifices made by people to a higher deity.[24] The act of giving to the church can be equated to the act of giving to God, and therefore is classified as a *taulaga*. However, the act of giving that was done by the widow from Zarephath was made to Elijah; not to a deity. This highlights the need to look at a meaning of the word *taulaga* that is to be adopted by this paper, to read and understand the widow's action.

1.2.2 An Etymology of the word *Taulaga*

To gain a more thorough understanding of *taulaga*, it is important to analyse the etymological construction of the word because Samoan words often consist of a construct of two or more words that when broken up, can illuminate and clarify meaning of that particular word. Furthermore, the formulation of most Samoan words,

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[23] Similar to definition of 'sacrifice' cf. *Webster's School Dictionary*, 1980, s.v. "sacrifice", 802.

[24] Alo P. Pita, "The Widow's Offering and Jesus' Response (Mark 12:41-44): A Comparative Study to Giving from a Samoan Ecclesiastical Perspective" (BD Thesis, Malua Theological College, 2010), 4.

are based on observations, so when a word is deconstructed, they point to a particular observation or even a Samoan myth. Penehuro Lefale, in his article titled "Ua Afa le Aso, Stormy Weather Today: Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Weather and Culture. The Samoa Experience" highlights how Samoans name the stars and winds based on how they observe them to be.[25] In a similar manner of observation, I will deconstruct *taulaga* to highlight its other nuances for the purpose of constructing my hermeneutic.

Taulaga can be seen as made up of two distinct words – *tau* and *laga*. *Tau* can be a word of its own, which means fight or hit. It can also refer to when something comes to an end, or when someone reaches its planned destination – *ua tau i le i'uga* (it has reached the end). It also has a relational meaning, to explain whether one is related to another – *ou te tau i le teine* (I am related to the girl). It is also the translation of "weather" – *ua vevela le tau* (the weather is hot). Moreover, *tau* can be used as a prefix to a verb. It gives the meaning of "something that is about to start" – *tau galo atu* (starting to forget). Some of these meanings serve to aid the purpose of this paper. On the one hand, fight gives the sense of a struggle. This meaning fits well with the aim to struggle with the text, with the intention to bring out the oppressed voice of the widow, and the often neglected good deed that she made. On the other hand, to be used as a prefix to give the logic of starting something, leads to the sense of free-will giving.

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[25] Lefale, Penehuro Fatu. "Ua Afa le Aso Stormy Weather Today: Traditional Ecological Knowledge of Weather and Culture. The Samoa Experience." *Climate Change* (2010): 317-335.

Laga on the other hand, means "to rise to arms, or to rise up, or to rise from a sitting position."[26] It offers the meaning of "to bring out" or "to bring up" something. It can also mean to 'weave' as the action of weaving which women use to weave fine mats, is called *lalaga*, which is merely the emphasis of the word *laga*.

When these two words are put together, it gives the nuance of something that is starting to rise, or to be raised. This fits in well with Pratt's other meaning of the word *taulaga*, as 'to endeavor to raise.' This also is in agreement with Papalii S. Ma'ia'i's meaning of the word *taulaga*, as "*ofoa'iga*, or *tauofoga*."[27] *Ofoa'iga* is to kick-start something, as in '*ofoa'iga o se pese*,' the initiating of the singing of a song. Likewise, *tauofoga* comes from the root word "*ofo*", which means to donate, or to offer something.

1.3 *Taulaga* as a Hermeneutical Lens

The tendency in reading, is that the widow plays a secondary role, and her purpose is to elevate the main character, Elijah.[28] This for me is an embarrassment, and as a Samoan man, I apologise to my *tuafafine*[29] and seek reconciliation for such androcentric tendencies. This paper aims to bring this nameless woman out of the passage, by exploring the significance of her deed to the prophet. In this part of the

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[26] George Pratt, "Taulaga" in *Pratt's Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language*; (Apia, Samoa; Malua Printing Press, 1911), 300.

[27] Papalii Dr. Semisi Ma'ia'i, "*Tusi Upu Samoa: The Samoan Dictionary of Papalii Dr. Semisi Ma'ia'i;*", 2nd edition, (Auckland, New Zealand; Little Island Press Ltd; 2013), 366.

[28] M.J.Evans, "Women." in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Historical Books*, ed. Bill T. Arnold & H. G. M. Williamson. (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 999.

[29] *Tuafafine* is the Samoan word for sister. I do not refer to my own sister, but to all my sisters in general, i.e. all women.

chapter, a discussion on defining the different types of hermeneutics will be made, and then focus on the one type that this paper will adopt to read the text.

1.3.1 Beginning with the Reader: A Theoretical Understanding of Hermeneutics

There are many definitions of the term 'Hermeneutics.' It can be argued that hermeneutics is "a way of dealing with the text,"[30] or a theory of interpretation for a particular text. Paul Ricoeur, a French philosopher known for his work in phenomenological hermeneutics, defines hermeneutics as "the theory of the rules that preside over an exegesis – that is, over the interpretation of a particular text or of a group of signs that maybe viewed as a text."[31] The existence of the word 'interpretation' in this definition places the onus of the exegesis on the person reading the text. The text can only have meaning when the reader makes a stance, in understanding a particular text. This stance is shaped by the reader's interpretation of the text and how he makes meaning out of it.

1.3.2 Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons

In this hermeneutical exercise, I am particularly intrigued in Hans-Georg Gadamer's "Fusion of Horizons" as it promotes the significance of the reader in making meaning for a text. In his book, *Truth and Method*, Gadamer explains the concept of horizon as follows:

> Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision.

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[30] David Stewart, "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion", in *Journal of Literature & Theology*, Vol 3, No.3, Nov 1989, 1.

[31] David Stewart, "The Hermeneutics of Suspicion", 1.

> Hence essential part of the concept of situation is the concept of "*horizon*." The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point... A person who has no horizon is a man who does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him. On the other hand, "to have an horizon" means not being limited to what is nearby, but to being able to see beyond it ... [W]orking out of the hermeneutical situation means the achievement of the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition.[32]

As a point of illustration, we imagine that Person A and person B engage in a conversation to exchange their ideas. As Person A is giving his information, Person B's range of horizon is widened and enriched as a fusion takes place between his own ideas, and the new ideas that Person A is giving him. Thus, interpreting a text involves a 'fusion of horizons' where the reader finds a way to articulate the text in light of his own background. It begins with an anticipation on the part of the reader, based on his or her upbringing or "historical conditionedness."[33] and upon reading the text, finds "points of fusion in their understanding; it culminates with the production of a revised interpretation that may shape subsequent pre-understandings of that very text".[34] With this understanding, I intend to fuse the horizon of the text with my horizon as a reader (in *taulaga*), to weave out and *laga* the important aspects of the story in 1 Kings 17:8-16. As a Samoan who was brought up in a Christian family, I have had the experience of how offerings are made in church, and how these offerings elevate a person within his/her society.

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[32] Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*. 2nd Revised ed. Translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, (New York: Continuum, 1997), 302.

[33] Hans-Georg Gadamer. *Truth and Method*, 302.

[34] Roger Lundin, Clarence Walhout, Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Promise of Hermeneutics*, (Grand Rapids; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1999), 57.

1.3.3 Re-interpreting Fusion as *Taulaga*

As 'fusion', *taulaga* can be implemented to read the critical aspects of the story about Elijah and the widow of Zarephath. Using the same etymological break-up of the word *tau-laga*, I will use *taulaga* to reinterpret fusion between my horizon and that of the text. Using Gadamer's sound concept of 'fusion of horizons' I call my horizon as the reader *tau*. In reading, I *tau* with the text. That is, I am fighting, wrestling, struggling, tussling, weaving with the text, in order to free up all neglected voices and all characters within the text. *Tau* allows me to strive towards my goal while exhausting all my available resources. In reading, *tau* allows me to read the text thoroughly while exhausting my interpretive tools. With this, I wish to acknowledge my Samoan culture, which has conditioned my reading.[35] As a Samoan, the history of my people prior to independence in 1962, is one of colonization. The Germans, New Zealand (via the British) and the European missionaries had colonized our people and to this day, we still reel from the effects of colonialism. Pacific writers like Epeli Hau'ofa and Albert Wendt have led the call for Pacific islanders to liberate their minds and selfhood in light of their colonial pasts.[36] This is why I *tau*, so that I may liberate the selfhood of neglected voices in the text.[37]

Secondly, the horizon of the text is brought up through '*laga*.' As I meet the text through *tau*, the text and its various meanings and nuances, whether obvious or not, are

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[35] Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 302.

[36] Cf. Epeli Hauofa. "Our Sea of Islands" in *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, edited by E. Waddell et al, Suva: The University of the South Pacific in association with Beake House (1993), Also cf. Albert Wendt, "Towards a New Oceania" in *Mana Review*, Jan ed. 1 (1) (1976), 54.

[37] I briefly bring postcolonial theory to the discussion here as it is difficult to avoid when discussing cultures with a colonial past such as my Samoan culture. It is therefore appropriate that I acknowledge the works of Raj Sugiratha and other prominent scholars in the field of postcolonial studies.

uprooted via '*laga*.' As matai *Laga* their wisdom to make decisions, and women *laga* fine mats through weaving, I also seek to *laga* out meaning in stories such as that of the Zarephath widow, with elements that remain neglected through androcentric tendencies, stereotypes and colonial censoring. Therefore, the *taulaga* hermeneutic is a way of struggling with the text (*tau*), in order to bring out (*laga*) the importance of neglected voices in the text, in order to make new meaning.

1.4 Summary

This chapter serves as an introduction into the creation of a hermeneutic and theoretical framework to read the story about the offering made by the widow from Zarephath. The background of the story is visited to put things into perspective, in light of the social status of the widow, as well as the political situation that sets the scene of the story. Subsequently, the concept of *taulaga* is explained in light of the different Samoan contexts and their relevance to the story.

From this platform, a hermeneutic was formulated based on an etymological study into the possible constructions of the word *taulaga*. Samoan names and words are often reflective of events, and are often a construction of two or more words. The word *taulaga* was deconstructed as being made up of two distinct words: *tau* and *laga*. Each word was studied to create my hermeneutic to read the text. The word *tau* was used to explain the process of engaging the text head-on, and understood as a confrontation with the text. The word *laga*, on the other hand, was used to explain the analytical process that takes place during the confrontation. *Laga* highlighted the act of pulling

out neglected voices in texts, while allowing the weaving of one's perspective into the horizon of the text.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY AND RE-READING OF THE TEXT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two parts. The methodology will be dealt with in part one, where I will explain my chosen methodology of Reader Response Criticism that I will use to analyze the text. Due to the limitations of this thesis, I cannot talk at great lengths of many advocates for this methodology. I will however briefly discuss some prominent theorists of Reader Response Criticism, specifically, Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, and Hans Georg-Gadamer, of whose views coincide with what I maintain as vital in the theoretical understanding behind Reader Response Criticism. From this I will focus on Gadamer's "fusion of horizon" to act as a theoretical framework for my own reader response which resonates with my hermeneutic of t*aulaga* as an interpretation of Gadamer's 'fusion.' In part two, I will be utilizing my proposed *taulaga* reading to re-read 1 Kings 17:8-16, in a bid to hear and elevate the neglected voices within this text.

2.2 Methodology

I have chosen Reader-Response Criticism to analyze my chosen text. I find this method intriguing in the sense that it focuses on creating meaning through the act of reading itself. It gives space for me as a reader, to engage and try to make meaning of the text. In my reader response, I seek to create meaning of the text from my perspective of *taulaga*. Due to the limitations of this thesis, I will engage briefly in discussing some of the prominent theories in Reader Response, such as those of Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish and Hans-Georg Gadamer.

2.2.1 What is Reader-Response Criticism?

Reader-response criticism came about as a response to traditional criticisms of literature that stressed the primacy of the text. As a result, attention was given to the significance of the reader and his/her response to the text. In other words, the meaning of the text depends on the reader's reception of, or reaction to the text. This is called "Reception Theory."[38] The importance of this theory is the impact a text has on the reader, and the responses that are triggered within the reader when reading the text.[39] The meaning of the text depends largely on how the reader reads it, and makes meaning of it.

Stanley Fish, an American literary critic particularly associated with reader-response criticism, states that the focus of Reader-Response Criticism includes the validity and significance of interpretations guided by the environments or communities inhabited by the readers.[40] He explains that meaning is determined at the end of a unit and that "any understandings preliminary to that one are to be disregarded as an unfortunate consequence of the fact that reading proceeds in time."[41] Fish contends that "everything a reader does, even if he later undoes it, is a part of the "meaning experience" and should not be discarded."[42] This further emphasizes the supremacy of the reader in that the reader has the power to read the text and make and create meaning.

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[38] Cf. Mark G. Brett, "The Future of Reader Criticisms?" in *The Open Text: New Directions for Biblical Studies*, ed. Francis Watson (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1993), 20.

[39] Cf. Yanling Shi, "Review of Wolfgang Iser and His Reception Theory" in *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 6, June 2013, 983.

[40] Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 2.

[41] Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class?, 3.

[42] Ibid, 4.

Another renowned scholar who held this belief was Wolfgang Iser, a German literary scholar who came up with the concept of the Implied Reader. "The term incorporates both the pre-structuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader's actualization of this potential through the reading process."[43] This is elaborated by Mark Brett who identified this concept as "a trans-historical ideal who works with information supplied by the text and only by the text."[44] In other words, the text has no meaning if there is no reader to make meaning to it.

People have different backgrounds and different upbringings. The same can be said of the author and the reader. However, when the reader reads the text, he is trying to make sense of the horizon of the text. It is in this confrontation that a 'fusion' takes place. Hans-Georg Gadamer, a German philosopher who championed philosophical hermeneutics, coined the concept 'Fusion of Horizons' in his book called *Truth and Method* where he defines 'horizon' as the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point."[45] Gadamer is of the view that every individual was brought up in a way that is different from another individual, and that this upbringing is rooted in the particular environment and culture that shaped them. Therefore, the interpretation of a text entails a 'fusion of horizons' where the reader of the text finds the way to express the text's history (vision) with their own background. Range of vision as Gadamer states, is what the reader sees or reads. It is everything that

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[43] Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett.* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), xxii.

[44] Mark G. Brett, "The Future of Reader Criticisms?", 19.

[45] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 302.

is within the reader's vision. This is why it is called a horizon, because what the reader reads should resemble somewhat of a panoramic view.

2.2.2 Reader-Response using *Taulaga* Hermeneutics

In this part of the paper, I will demonstrate how my *taulaga* hermeneutic is to be used to interpret the fusion together of the horizon of the text and my horizon as the reader, as an inquiry to the text from my vantage point. In my etymological discussion of the word *taulaga* in the previous chapter, the significance of the two words, *tau* and *laga* that make up *taulaga* play an important role in explaining the horizon of the text. *Tau* signifies a struggle or fight, which exemplifies the action that a reader is doing when engaging with the text. It describes the struggle to make meaning in light of a contentious issue or the lack of an obvious meaning available. The reader needs to fight, wrestle, struggle and tussle with the text in order to loosen the shackles of gender biased interpretations that seek to neglect minority voices and marginalized characters. Theoretically, when I *tau* with the text, it is a struggle and a fight for meaning, and in order to make meaning, I bring my horizon and fuse with the horizon of the text.

In this *tau*, the reader is at the same time struggling, tussling, weaving and fusing my horizon with the text, and to all that is happening therein. If the reader does not 'fight' or *tau* with the text, then he/she is not doing justice to the text, which means all the marginalized and neglected voices in the text will remain submerged. *Tau* requires the reader to exhaust all the interpretive tools available to him/her in order to respond to the text.

On the other hand, the word *laga* is to bring out or to bring up something. By bringing out something implies that it is inside or within something else, and it needs to be brought out. To bring up something implies that it is down and needs to be elevated, or something that is buried that needs to be exposed.

As such, I *tau* to *laga* the various elements buried and/or neglected in the text. I therefore seek to *laga* out the colonial attitudes present in the text which suppress subaltern and marginalized voices. In this case, widowed women are stereotyped as hopeless throughout the Bible, and are therefore incapable of standing on their own two feet. They are nameless, and normally say nothing. This suggests the anxiety of a male-dominant bureaucracy that seeks to limit the voice of women in decision-making. On the contrary, the widow here speaks up, and questions the logic behind a selfish request. Contrary also to those who normally conduct offerings and sacrifices (usually males), the widow here breaks the shackles of male stereotyping, and conducts an offering. *Laga* therefore seeks to bring this out from the text, in the manner of postcolonial criticism.

2.3 Analyzing the Text

I now turn to the text in an attempt to analyze certain points that will bring meaning to me as a reader. This is to be done while keeping in mind the questions that were asked in Chapter One, especially of whether the offering made by the widow of Zarephath qualifies as a *taulaga*. In analyzing the text, I have divided the text into five (5) parts, and will be analyzed using *taulaga* hermeneutics to bring out any hidden meanings and the neglected voices therein. The analysis will consist of two sections:

tau and *laga*. Questions will be asked in the process of *tau*, and then an analysis and discussion during the process of *laga* will bring forth the results.

2.3.1 The Divine Command

> [8]Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, [9]"Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there; for I have commanded a widow there to feed you."[46]

***Tau*:**

Is there a significance of the opening phrase – "Then the word of the Lord"? What is the significance of Zarephath and Sidon? Why, out of all the people in Zarephath, would God choose a widow? Is there a significance in the use of the word "feed" in verse 9?

***Laga*:**

The text begins with "the word of the Lord", דְּבַר־יְהוָה which came to Elijah. The phrase "the word of the Lord" is often referred to as prophetic revelation, spoken directly by God to an individual, who in the Old Testament is usually a prophet. It is an authentication phrase to validate and confirm that the statement by the prophet is actually from God.

The word of the Lord in this text is a command to His prophet Elijah, to arise and go to the Phoenician town of Zarephath. As mentioned in Chapter One, the text is littered with ironies. One irony is that Zarephath is a foreign land; not of the Israelites. The people of Zarephath worship a god of rain and fertility who they believe brings

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[46] "1 Kings 17:8-9," in The Holy Bible. *New Revised Standard Version* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 253.

prosperity. So here we have an Israelite going to a gentile land who worship a god that is different from the Israelite God. The encounter is made notwithstanding the different genders, the different loyalties and the fact that the clean (Elijah) is making contact with the unclean (widow).

The other irony is that God has "commanded a widow" to feed Elijah. The widow is the last person one would depend upon for food, because a widow is someone who depends on others for food. It may seem that the widow is passive, as she is simply commanded by God to feed Elijah. But as we learn later in verse 12, she hesitates. As I *tau* with the text, I *laga* out the widow's character, who in spite of the divine command, she still voices her concern. The Lord's command therefore is not evidence of her passiveness, but I contend that it introduces her courage, in anticipation of her response.

It is also worth noting that the piel form in which the word לְכַלְכְּלֶךָּ or "feed" [47] suggests that the widow was commanded to feed him continuously. One would wonder if this was an unfair expectation on the widow, or whether it was a pointer to her later blessings. It seems undoable and impossible to the human mind, but it requires faith on the part of the person who receives the word of the Lord.

2.3.2 Elijah's Request

> **10**So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, "Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink." **11**As she was going to

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[47] Francis Brown, "כּוּל" in *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 465.

> bring it, he called to her and said, "Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand."[48]

***Tau*:**

How did Elijah know that the woman whom he called out to for some water was the widow that he was sent to? Why did the widow comply so easily with Elijah's first request?

***Laga*:**

When Elijah arrived at the city gate, he saw the widow and asked for some water first. It was the custom in this part of the country that hospitality protocols be observed for strangers and travelers passing by.[49] Often the host offers water, food or shelter for the stranger. However, in this verse, it was Elijah – the stranger, who initiated the request. She however complied and went out to fetch water for the stranger. But while she was on her way, Elijah added another request on top of the first one - he asked for a morsel of bread. According to hospitality laws of the Ancient Near East at the time, this should be a normal request, for the host is expected to offer water to drink and food to eat for the stranger.[50]

2.3.3 The Widow Speaks Out

> **12**But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."[51]

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[48] "1 Kings 17:10-11."

[49] John Koenig, "Hospitality" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol 3 H-J, David Noel Freedman, ed, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 299.

[50] Ibid, 299

[51] "1 Kings 17:12."

***Tau*:**

What is the significance of the widow answering back, both in the context of the story, and the Samoan local context? Is there a significance in the statement – as the Lord your God lives? She mentioned her son. Why is this important? "Only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug" – did she had to mention this? Why is this important?

***Laga*:**

There are several important points that can be uplifted out of this verse. The fact that the widow has answered back to Elijah, is very unusual in the context of the Ancient Near East and their treatment of widows; for widows are usually passive and have no voice when a story is told. However, this widow does have a voice in this story.

She begins her answer with a reference to the God of Elijah, "the Lord your God". According to Matthew J.M. Coomber, this was how Elijah knew that this was the widow that God had sent him to.[52] It also shows that the widow was aware of the God of Elijah, otherwise she would not have mentioned "your God". This is rather strange that someone from a country that believes in Baal is aware of the God of the Israelites.

The mention of her son in her reply has brought out another important factor in understanding her situation. She is already vulnerable in being a widow but in addition, there is the added responsibility of having to support her child. This brings forth the importance of these characters in the story. Not only the widow, but also her son.

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[52] Matthew J.M. Coomber, "Exegetical Notes on 1 Kings 17:8–16: The Widow of Zarephath" in *The Expository Times* Vol 118, No.8, (Los Angeles,: SAGE Publications, 2007), 389.

"They are unnamed, unknown and can easily be forgotten and overlooked within the narrative as they perform their function and then disappear."[53] To be forgotten or overlooked, is the same as to be neglected and abandoned.

The amount of food she mentions she has is usually viewed as a hesitation to give out that food to feed someone else other than herself and her son. However, my *taulaga* perspective offers an alternative view. In the Samoan context, when an offering is made (during a wedding or a funeral), the person representing the offering party tries his best to belittle himself in order to honour the receiving party. Typically, the offering person would say, *"e le o mea ia e tatau mo le faalavelave, ae malilie ua pau lava o mea ua maua"* (what we have presented does not match the prestigious nature of the occasion, but please bear with us, for this is all we have).[54] This is said irrespective of whether the *taulaga* that is being offered is more than enough or insufficient. The attempt by the offering party to belittle their offering elevates the receiver's status in the confrontation. From the alternative perspective of *taulaga*, the widow's seeming reluctance to give to Elijah could be viewed as an honourable way of presenting her *taulaga*, in that what she had was inappropriate to be given to the guest before her. The meagerness of the amount she had, as identified through her words, "*that we may eat it, and die*" through the lens of *taulaga*, could be interpreted as modesty with a hint of embarrassment, for she does not have enough for this highly regarded guest.

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[53] Cf. Seumaninoa Puaina, "Beyond Universalism: Unraveling the Anonymous Minor Characters in Matthew 15:21-28" (PhD Thesis, Berkeley College, 2016), 1.

[54] My translation.

2.3.4 Elijah's Response

> [13]Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. [14]"For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth."[55]

***Tau*:**

Elijah did not say, to make him a cake first. He told the woman to make something for her and her son first. What is the significance of this in light of the way we do our offerings? What does this say about the way we serve the Lord and the way we serve our families? The blessings that were promised to the widow – was it dependent on the actions required of her?

***Laga*:**

Elijah's initial part of his response serves as an assurance statement for the widow. "Do not be afraid"[56] appears in a tense that stresses importance.[57] The instruction not to be afraid assures the widow that she should not be afraid of death, which she so believes is her fate and that of her son's. The next part of Elijah's response is interesting in the sense that Elijah does not disagree with the widow – "go and do as you have said, but ..."[58] Elijah gives her the approval to proceed with doing what she said – to feed herself and her son. This is important in the sense that some people in my congregation have taken offering to the extreme in the belief that when making offerings to the Lord, they are obligated to give up everything they have, and

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[55] "1 Kings 17:13-14."

[56] "1 Kings 17:13."

[57] This word appears in the imperative form, which can be a command. But in its cohortative sense, it serves as an encouragement.

[58] "1 Kings 17:13."

leave nothing behind for themselves. Yet, I *laga* out this aspect of the story. Elijah, the man of God, did not want the widow to give up everything she had for the sake of satisfying the hospitality obligations of the host party. Elijah agreed with the widow, that she and her son had to be fed.

Moreover, the use of the particle adverb אַךְ which I have translated as 'but' to bridge the first part to the next part of Elijah's response, gives the meaning that the next part will be in contrast to the preceding part. "…but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me."[59] How can she give and still feed herself and her son with the very little amount she has? I *laga* out the widow's offering here. She was instructed to make a cake first from the little that she had, and give it first to the man of God. She was never instructed to use everything she had, nor was she ordered to make a cake exclusively for Elijah. Rather, she was encouraged to portion what she had, for her and her son, as well as the prophet.

The final part of Elijah's response in verse 14 is a prophecy of what will happen. "The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth."[60] One can isolate the blessings that were prophesied by Elijah in verse 14 from the instruction given to the widow in verse 13. In the Old Testament, YHWH is particularly kind to the vulnerable people that include widows and orphans. In that regard, one can reach a conclusion then that God was going to take care of the widow anyway, irrespective of whether she obeys the command and makes a cake for Elijah.

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[59] "1 Kings 17:13."

[60] "1 Kings 17:14."

However, the *taulaga* reading offers an alternative perspective. The use of the particle conjunction כִּי which is translated in the NRSV Bible as "for" links the blessings in verse 14 to the actions commanded in verse 13. The blessings promised in verse 14 is not dependent on the actions commanded of the widow, but will be given anyway. The emphasis then should not be on the amount of what one gives, but on one's willingness to share whatever amount one has, and firstly share that with the Lord or his representative. This is also the emphasis of the Samoan nature of *taulaga*, where sharing is pivotal in maintaining a harmonious environment in the society.

2.3.5 The Divine Fulfillment

> She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.[61]

***Tau*:**

The widow's compliance with Elijah's command is important. Why? What does this say about our prioritization? What is the significance of "the word of the Lord" in the last verse?

***Laga*:**

The first part of verse 15 denotes the widow's consent to comply with Elijah's command. "She went and did as Elijah said"[62] it shows that she used the little amount of meal she had in the jar, and the little amount of oil she had left in the jug, and she baked a bread with it. More importantly, she shared it firstly with Elijah, before eating what remained with her son.

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[61] "1 Kings 17:15-16."

[62] "1 Kings 17:15."

Finally, the prophecy that Elijah made in verse 14 was fulfilled. The jar of meal was not emptied, and the jug did not run out of oil. What is of interest to me is the final part of verse 16, where this fulfillment of the prophecy is a direct consequence of the Lord being true to His word. The phrase כִּדְבַר יְהוָה which I have translated as "according to the word of the Lord" ties this whole story together, that the "word" that started off this story. This is the same "word" that draws the curtain onto it. This is similar to a parallel version of an epilogue of a *taulaga*. When all the speeches are done and all the offerings are made, the last part of this dialogue is called "*Faamatafi lagi o le aso*", which is literally translated as a prayer to "remove the clouds of the day."[63] It is the last act of presenting the *taulaga*. It signifies the blessings that both parties have witnessed during their presentations. The same blessings are conveyed in this last act, as both parties are about to part ways. As it is with the word of the Lord in the beginning of our text, it also ends with it.

2.4 A *Tau-laga* Structure of 1 Kings 17:8-16:

When analyzing the text, I *laga* out a unique structure that is used to present the text. The text is presented in a Chiasmus, as follows:

A The Divine Command (v8 & v9)
B Elijah's Request (v10 & v11)
C The Widow Speaks Out (v12)

[63] Clouds block the sunlight and is representative of darkness. Therefore, the prayer for the removal of these clouds will ensure that darkness (which symbolizes sorrow) does not befall on the members of the gathering.

B' Elijah's Response (v13 & v14)

A' The Divine Fulfillment (v15 - v16)

The divine command in A is matched with the divine fulfillment of God's promise in A'. Similarly, Elijah's request in B is matched with his response in B'. This leaves verse 12 where the widow speaks out, at the core or center of this text. This elevates her status in the story and places importance on her speech in this verse, which seems like a moment of hesitation, is viewed as a speech to present her *taulaga*.

Furthermore, this chiastic structure reflects the Samoan concept of *va*. *Va* refers to space, and in Samoan culture, this refers to the space between people. It is a sacred space that demands *faaaloalo* (respect). We can see this *va* between the widow and the prophet, and in the context of the story, it is Elijah who steps into the sacred *va* of the widow. The highlight of this encounter as noted is the widow's speech, as she presents her *taulaga*. This is an act of *faaaloalo* which is unique and honourable as it is shown by the widow to a complete stranger.

2.5 Summary

The *taulaga* reading that I have proposed is an alternative reading, which gives the widow prominence. It is by no means the only reading capable of doing this, but it places emphasis on her deeds, which in the Samoan context, can be seen as *taulaga*. Her deeds, in the Samoan perspective of *taulaga*, are reflective of an individual of exemplary character who shows honour to one's family, but also to those of dignified status. It may not be the biblical sense of offering specific to priests and Levites, but from the alternative view of *taulaga*, her deeds are just as important, if not greater.

The neglected voice of the widow is a result of androcentric tendencies in interpretation. She stands out of the norm as far as how widows are treated in the Ancient Near Eastern society of the Old Testament. Normally, widows do not have a voice when a story is told. However, this widow speaks out, in a seemingly pessimistic way to Elijah's command. This demonstrates why a *taulaga* hermeneutic is needed, for it enables me to *tau* or delve in and tussle with the text, to *laga* out the neglected voice and dire situation of the widow, and the alternative possibilities of its interpretation. As a result, she is not pessimistic, but embarrassingly modest.

As a consequence of the exegetical work done in this chapter, the widow's offering can now be viewed as a genuine offering that is done willingly from the heart. Moreover, it has also shown that God does not want to burden us in making offerings to Him. However, the sharing of what we have with God is being highlighted in using the *taulaga* reading. Not only that but a picture of the prioritization of God when sharing what we have, is another important element that has come out of this work.

CHAPTER 3

IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

3.1 Introduction

This final chapter will bring together everything that has been discussed so far, and focus on the implications of using my *taulaga* reading to provide an alternative reading method to read the story of the Zarephath widow and her *taulaga.* It will discuss how this reading has managed to help me bring out the neglected voices and characters in the story of the Zarephath widow and her offering. The implication of this reading will also help me understand how a Samoan Christian traditionally views *taulaga*. Having done that, I will endeavor to reflect theologically on this reading and discuss its relevance and impact on the way we give in our modern context.

3.2 Reading Implications

The *taulaga* reading used in this paper has opened up many possibilities of reading into the different dimensions that are buried in the story of the Zarephath widow and her offering. Two particularly important aspects will be focused upon in this discussion:

3.2.1 Neglected Voices and Characters

The story of the Zarephath widow is placed within the narratives that demonstrated God's power over Baal, the Canaanite god of rain and fertility. The main character in these stories is Elijah, the prophet of God. However, the use of other characters and the unusual voice of the widow in this particular passage is unique in this story. First of all, God uses the widow to sustain the prophet in a foreign land. A

widow being of low class in society, who fends for herself, is hardly the type of person that anyone would choose to provide for his servant. With the application of the *taulaga* reading to the text, the widow is now being elevated to an important status in this story. Her reply to Elijah can be viewed from a *taulaga* reading as a statement of humility that often accompanies the offering of a *taulaga.* Her statement has bridged the sacred space between her, who is making the offering, and Elijah, whom the offering is for. The occupation of this space is usually dominated by males.

In the Samoan context during the presentation of *taulaga* for any occasion, the presenter has to face someone who replies on behalf of the receiving party. The widow in this case presented the *taulaga,* and Elijah was the representative of the receiving party, who is himself. As a result of this reading into the oppressed voice of the widow, which has been brought out in the open using the process of *laga*, it can be said that the widow is capable of fulfilling the role of a *Tulafale*[64] that is usually occupied by males. Nevertheless, there are many Samoan women who have been bestowed with *Tulafale* title by their *aiga potopoto* or extended family.

The *taulaga* reading of the story of the Zarephath widow has helped me bridge the gap in my understanding of gender equality. Her reply, which seems at first to be a protest, can now be viewed as an oratory tactic that is often carried out when presenting a *taulaga*. She knew that what she had was not appropriate for a person in the caliber of Elijah, the man of God. Her statement has revealed her character and therefore makes her a *Tulafale* in this story.

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[64]There are two types of chiefs in Samoa – the high chief (*Tamalii*), and the talking chief, or the orator (*Tulafale*). When both are present in a gathering, the *Tulafale* usually speaks on behalf of the *Tamalii*. The *Tulafale* is also expected to reply to a speech by another *Tulafale* or by a high chief.

3.2.2 The Widow's Deed: *Taulaga* or Not?

The offering made by the widow was a selfless act. It is common in the Samoan society that the people who contribute generously are given respect. Generosity to a particular cause is often considered in Samoan society as a representation of one's *tautua* (service) to the village. A similar treatment is due for this widow and her *taulaga*. People offer out of their abundance, whereas this widow offered out of the small amount she had. Her *tautua* was thus more emphatic. In Samoan society, *taulaga* and *tautua* are synonymous which leads to the widow's *taulaga* being exemplified as a *tautua* to the prophet of YHWH.

In the New Testament, Jesus witnessed the offering made by a widow at the temple, and said to His disciples, "Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on."[65] Jesus was referring to the offering of two small copper coins into the treasury of the temple. The two small copper coins is a very small amount. This can be viewed as equivalent to the offering made by the Zarephath widow. The meagerness of the amount of food she and her son had, makes her *taulaga* special. This makes it unique and honorable. It is no wonder that Jesus referred to this widow in the New Testament:

> "But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon."[66]

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[65] "Luke 21:3-4,"

[66] "Luke 4:25-26."

This reference confirms the honorability of this widow's *taulaga*, and of her elevated status. In other words, the widow's *taulaga* had an impact even on Jesus Christ himself in the beginning of His ministry. This in itself speaks volumes in the importance of what the widow did in sustaining God's servant. Jesus recognized and acknowledged the widow's *taulaga*, which at the same time has bestowed upon it a mark of distinction. This reading has *laga* out the significance of the widow's *taulaga*, in a similar way that Jesus had *laga* out this widow's *taulaga*, to demonstrate its uniqueness and exceptionality with the way other offerings are made. Furthermore, the widow who was nameless, through her *taulaga* or her *tautua* had earned the distinction of *tulafale*. She offered an unlikely *taulaga*, which served to become an exceptional *tautua* to the prophet of YHWH. She spoke with distinction, as she defended her family (*aiga*). Such are the qualities of the *tulafale*: a person who has served with distinction to his/her *aiga* and deity, and who speaks with distinction on behalf of his/her family. She is the *tulafale* from Zarephath.

3.3 Theological Reflection

The analysis of the story using the *taulaga* reading has opened up many possibilities for one to theologically reflect upon. For this part of the paper, focus will be given to reflect on two things: a reflection on the individual's *taulaga* or how one makes a *taulaga*, and a reflection on a view about how my church, the *Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa* (EFKS) does its *taulaga*.

3.3.1 The Individual's *Taulaga*:

The use of the *taulaga* reading to analyze this story can be seen as a way to shed some light on how we individually do or make our *taulaga.* In my experience, there are several factors that play a vital role in determining one's *taulaga*. First, what we have at hand or what is available. Second, the culture and the environment we find ourselves in. And third, our personal attitude and the human pride that we individually have. These will be discussed below:

3.3.1.1 What is Available

For tailors, they are used to the saying that "we should sew a dress according to the amount of cloth that we have". It means that they can not sew a big dress with a small amount of cloth. When it comes to budgeting the amount of money a family has, they have to allocate it carefully so that all the important needs are met, and the major expenses paid. This is where the prioritization skills play an important role. The widow did not have much at her disposal. What we know from the text is that she only had a "handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug". That is a very small amount, to try and allocate among three people. Yet, she managed to distribute it amongst the three of them. The important thing was that she shared it first with Elijah, the man of God.

As Samoan Christians, we often find ourselves in a similar situation to that of the widow. We are often faced with situations where we have very little and we struggle to juggle between all sorts of expenses: bills, fees, food expenses, transportation expenses and other expenses; and then of course, how much we give to the church. We tend to satisfy our needs and wants first, before giving to the Lord. It reminds me of a Samoan saying: *ua to i le i'u le inati o le Atua*, which can be translated as "the last priority is

God."[67] A reflection on this story as a result of our reading through the *taulaga* lens, has reminded me of the importance of prioritizing. No matter what and how much we have, we should not forget to prioritize God's share. The instruction for the widow was clear, "go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son."[68] The story does not say to give everything, and leave nothing for our families. In our pursuit to give to God, we should not neglect the needs of our own families. We should thus refrain from ostentatious giving and pride, but give out of what we can. The widow had a responsibility to feed her family. We also have responsibilities to take care of our families. But lest not forget, to give first to God.

This will have a huge bearing on the decisions that we make as individuals with regard to what is available to offer as a *taulaga*. How much to give, is dependent on the individual's decision. Making a *taulaga* requires a cheerful heart while making the *taulaga*. Paul says in his second letter to the Corinthians, "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."[69] Whatever we offer as a *taulaga*, we should offer with a cheerful heart. We should be satisfied that what we give is sufficient and appropriate for our *taulaga* to God.

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[67] My translation.

[68] "1 Kings 17:15."

[69] "2 Corinthians 9:7."

3.3.1.2 The *Taulaga* Environment

The *taulaga* Environment" is a term that I have coined to explain the environment in which we make our *taulaga* in. The Zarephath widow also had a *taulaga* environment, similar to the *va* or 'space' where Samoan protocols are practiced. This *va* was where she was able to make her *taulaga.* The hospitality protocols of her culture and that of the Ancient Near East determined her *taulaga* environment. Due to these protocols, she had to care for travelers passing by their town. Therefore, it is safe to say that she is required by her culture and her environment to give. It was Elijah that first approached her for some water. She did not object, because she knew that she is required by the environment she is in, to give water and food to care for travelers.

This can also be applied here in our context in Samoa. We have in Samoa up to now an established culture of giving even before the missionaries first arrived with the Gospel. Whenever we have a *faalavelave* (family occasion) the extended family members are required to contribute whatever they can afford – money, fine mats or food. The arrival of Christianity into Samoa saw the influence of this culture of giving on church affairs.[70] Therefore in the modern Samoan context, church members are required to give to the church, as part of their commitment to their calling as church members. This sets the tone for the *taulaga* environment for an individual church member. It is each member's obligation to make a *taulaga* as part of their calling.

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[70] Richard Phillip Gilson, *Samoa 1830 to 1900: The Politics of a Multi-Cultural Community*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 131.

3.3.1.3 The Widow's Attitude and Pride

The widow's humility in the way she made her *taulaga* is another reminder for Samoan Christians in our modern context. As individuals, we have our own human and individual pride within ourselves that prompts us to give to the Lord. However, there are times when we are tempted to offer more than what we can afford to give to the church. This is where the element of pride intermingles with the attitude of giving a *taulaga* to the Lord.

In the Samoan context, all *taulaga* given to church are required to be announced at the end of the service or during the service. This culture of announcing these *taulaga* during or after the service was adopted by the early missionaries from the traditions and culture of Samoa that were practiced at the time of the arrival of Christianity.[71] Whenever someone gives something to someone, a member of the receiver's family ought to announce what was given. It is announced in front of both the receiver and the giver, as a way of acknowledging the giver for what he brought.

However, this system is being criticized by some as being a contributing factor to the high levels of poverty in the country. The announcement of each individual's *taulaga* can also be viewed as a way of promoting competition for who would give the biggest *taulaga*. This is a negative and incorrect way of giving to the Lord, as shown from our *taulaga* reading. For one can go out of his/her way to make sure that his/her *taulaga* exceeds that of his/her competitor. The *taulaga* reading of the widow's *taulaga* has reminded us that giving to the Lord requires us to be true to ourselves and give with

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[71] Richard Phillip Gilson, *Samoa 1830 to 1900*, 131.

a cheerful heart. Not to let other outside factors determine how much we should give. She did not give everything to Elijah, for in verse 15, it says that "She went and did as Elijah said…", and since Elijah told her to make a cake for her and her son, but give some first to him, it is therefore clear that she gave some to Elijah, and held back some for her and her son.

3.4 Summary

This chapter has focused on the impact of my *taulaga* reading in the interpretation of the story of the Zarephath widow and her *taulaga*. It has brought out the significant elements within an individual's confines, which contribute to his/her motive to make a *taulaga*. Such elements include what is available at ones disposal, the *taulaga* environment and the attitude and pride within a person that influences how a person makes a *taulaga.*

The reading has also shed some light on how the church or the *EFKS* view *taulaga* or offerings from a societal point of view. The notion of giving with a cheerful, willing and satisfied heart is emphasized as significant in making a worthy *taulaga*.

The *EFKS* depend on the *taulaga* from the congregations in its various district constituencies to fund its missionary work as well as its developmental projects. The issue of making a *taulaga* then becomes an important aspect of the modern church.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent from my *taulaga* reading of 1 Kings 17: 8-16 that the offering made by the widow of Zarephath has elevated her status in the story. In the processes of *tau* and *laga*, the neglected voice of the widow was venerated. Elijah was sent to this particular widow from Zarephath for a reason. The culture of the Ancient Near Eastern countries which included Zarephath also had a noteworthy impact on the story, in terms of its hospitality protocols and how they play host to travelers who pass through their towns.

It was also in reading through the *taulaga* hermeneutic that I found that the conversation that took place between Elijah and the widow confirmed that Elijah was being sent to the right person whom God had chosen. During this conversation, the widow's response is usually treated as a reluctance to give anything to Elijah, for she had very little left. However, this paper has given rise to an alternative view to the widow's response. Her response was not that of reluctance, but rather a sign of humility as she belittles her *taulaga* out of respect for her guest, a trademark of *faaaloalo* (respect).

The use of this *taulaga* hermeneutic has also brought to the fore the importance of using unusual characters in this story. We have seen the ironic choice of choosing a widow to take care of God's servant, let alone taking care of anyone. However, through the *taulaga* lenses, we have seen that the choice of choosing the widow played an important part in re-affirming what this paper seeks to achieve. As the widow had little and was instructed to give first to the man of God, it sends a message of how we should view what constitutes a *taulaga.* It is something that is shared from whatever we have. This answers the question I had in the beginning, of whether the widow's deed constitutes a *taulaga*. This reading has proven that the widow's deed was indeed a

taulaga, and therefore making it a *tautua* or a service for her *aiga* or family. She is normally read as a foreigner. But her *taulaga* has venerated her in the story and therefore making Elijah the foreigner.

The mentioning of the widow's son is also of great significance in authenticating the smallness and meagerness of what is available to the widow. This smallness makes her *taulaga* unique, for although she had little, she shared it first with God. This has taught us a great deal with how we should view our *taulaga* in our modern day context. Are we seeing our *taulaga* the same way the widow did? Are we willing to share what we have, irrespective of its quantity, and share it first with God? Does the size of our *taulaga* matter? The reading into this text has reminded me that it is important to share what we have. The *taulaga* that are being offered in church is testimony to this sharing. That is God's share. What is important from this story is that we share it first with God. Whether big or small, God knows what we have, and He knows what we are giving Him. Whether we give out of our abundance, or out of our poverty, it is the spirit in which it is given that counts. As the widow shared it first with Elijah, we should also share what we have first with God.

This is also why *taulaga* is important to our individual congregations and the mother church as a whole. All *taulaga* are to be seen as the share of individual members who contribute their wealth to the Lord. Whether they were allocated first or last, they are to be treated with dignity and respect. For whatever we give, and whoever we give it to, is a *taulaga* to the Lord. Just as the widow who was willing to share a meal with the man of God as her *taulaga*, so should we, when we give to the Church, the pastor, or to anyone who is in need.

GLOSSARY

Afā	storm
Auala	a traditional worship to petition the occupants of the lower levels of heaven to allow the new spirit to pass
Ava	traditional Samoan worship
Faasao	first catch of the day dedicated to the god of the forest
Ifoga	way of showing remorse
Laga	pull out; pull up; weave
Lagi	heaven
Lotu	worship; church
Manuvao	traditional god of the forest
Mua	to become first
Ofo	donate
Ofoa'iga	to kick start something
Pe'a	bat
Sala	sacrifice for atonement
Sua	ofering of food to a deity
Tagaloalagi	traditional supreme deity
Tau	fight; when something comes to its end; relation to another; weather; starting something
Taula	a traditional priest
Taulaga	an anchorage for boats; a roost of a bat; Capital city; to endeavor to rise;
Tuifiti	title for Fijian King
Tulouna	to be excused

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