

A *TAOFIOFI* READING OF RUTH 1:6-18

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Faculty of the Malua Theological College

Samoa

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Requirements for the Degree

Bachelor of Theology

By

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ABSTRACT

The thesis will read Ruth 1:6-18 using a Samoan hermeneutic called *taofiofi*. The primary aim of this exercise is to use my social location as a Samoan (EFKS) church member and a Samoan concept as a hermeneutic to read and interpret a biblical text. The particulars of the exercise are as follows: Firstly, I will read Ruth 1:6-18 from a *taofiofi* hermeneutic using elements of *taofiofi* such as *fautuaga*, *taulaga*, *fa'asa'oloto*, *tete'e* and *tautua* to further illuminate the meaning of the biblical text. Secondly, I will situate the biblical text in its historical context, namely the post exilic period under Ezra/Nehemiah's (EN) restoration work. I will also identify EN's policy of banning foreign wives for the people of Yehud as the main issue addressed by the Book of Ruth. My hypothesis is that, Ruth's dialogue with Naomi especially Ruth's popular confession in Ruth 1:16-17 could be understood as *taofiofi*. In this regard, I will see my *taofiofi* reading as intentional hybridity, a postcolonial concept, undermining the above policy. Finally, I will give this alternative reading from my *taofiofi* hermeneutic and express its relevance to the EFKS ministry and how this reading could be useful for further studies of the Book of Ruth and the whole bible as well.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is about 11,675 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.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents:

Rev Aokuso Taumate and Tofa'ifa'alua Taumate

And to my siblings:

Nellie Letia Vineta, Papuaberona, Spencer, Vaelua, Samasoni, Aokuso

Jnr and Faoato Fa'amanuiaga:

And to all my families here in Samoa and overseas.

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A big *fa'afetai tele* to my parents Rev. Aokuso and Tofa'ifa'alua, and members of *EFKS Samata-i-Tai* for the prayers and support in many ways, I believe your continuous support has enabled the successful completion not only of this work, but also my studies here in Malua. *Fa'amalo le tapua'i ma ia fa'amanuia atu le Atua!*

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MAY GOD BLESS YOU ALL!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONSENT FORM	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
DECLARATION	iv
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATION	x
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 The Issue	1
1.2 Aims and Objectives	2
1.3 Text Selection- Ruth 1:6-18	3
1.4 Thesis Structure	5
CHAPTER 2: HERMENEUTIC AND METHODOLOGY.....	7
Introduction.....	7
2.1 <i>Taofiofi</i> as a Hermeneutic	7
2.1.1 MTC Student Experience	8
2.1.2 Samoan Cultural Context.....	10
2.2 Some Aspects of <i>Taofiofi</i> as Hermeneutical Lens.....	11
2.2.1 <i>Fautuaga</i>	11
2.2.2 <i>Taulaga</i>	12
2.2.3 <i>Fa'asa'oloto</i>	13
2.2.4 <i>Tete'e</i>	14
2.2.5 <i>Tautua</i>	15
2.3 Postcolonial Perspective.....	16
2.3.1 Intentional Hybridity.....	18
2.4 Historical Criticism	19
Summary.....	20
CHAPTER 3: A <i>TAOFIOFI</i> READING OF RUTH 1:6-18	21
Introduction.....	21
3.1 The Book of Ruth – A brief overview	21
3.2 A brief plot.....	23
viii	

3.3 Historical Background.....	24
3.4 A <i>Taofiofi</i> Reading of Ruth 1:6-18	25
3.4.1 <i>Fautuaga</i>	25
3.4.2 <i>Taulaga</i>	28
3.4.3 <i>Fa’asa’oloto</i>	30
3.4.4 <i>Tete’e</i>	32
3.4.5 <i>Tautua</i>	35
Summary.....	39
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION	40
Introduction.....	40
4.1 Summary of findings.....	40
4.2 Relevance for EFKS ministry	44
4.3 Contribution for further research.....	45
GLOSSARY	47
BIBLIOGRAPHY	50

LIST OF ABBREVIATION

ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
BDB	Brown Driver Briggs
BIBC	Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary
EFKS	Ekalesia Fa’apopototo Kerisiano Samoa
EN	Ezra/Nehemiah
MTC	Malua Theological College
NIB	New Interpreter’s Bible
TNAC	The New American Commentary
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since entering Malua Theological College (MTC) as a student back in 2016, I have always been fascinated by the way Samoan concepts and traditions, sayings, and even Samoan myths and legends are used as hermeneutics or tools to read and understand the bible. Moreover, the thought of putting emphasis and significance to my location as a reader really captures my interest. This is why I am attempting this exercise of reading a particular biblical text from my Samoan perspective. The selection of the concept *taofiofi*¹ as a method and perspective in this work basically stems from my personal experience growing up and especially when I attended Malua Theological College from 2016 until now.

Taofiofi is a common word that I normally hear at home and at school while growing up. It was used as an educational tool by my parents and teachers to teach and remind me of things that I was not supposed to do things that would hurt me and, in most cases, will also affect my siblings or other children. Only when I entered MTC that I began to give more thought on this word *taofiofi* because of its frequent use within the students' fellowship.

¹ Generally, *taofiofi* is the act of slowly putting a stop to something but not a sudden stop. It could also be a control mechanism to control something or someone from over reacting. The definition and detail discussion of *taofiofi* will be given in Chapter 2

1.1 The Issue

As a first year in MTC back in 2016, I never liked the word and its implications especially its frequent use by the final year students. The final year students usually use *taofiofi* to advise us not to express our minds too fast but must bide our time. In other words, they expect us to just obey and follow what they say. Their logic behind this *taofiofi* is that we have not yet understood how and why we do things here in the College. However, for me, this use of *taofiofi* is a means to oppress and suppress the talents and good deeds of a person who wants to make the community better. Interestingly, my view has changed as I progressed throughout my studies and I will explain this further later in the work.

Such an experience gives rise to my curiosity on whether such a Samoan concept as *taofiofi* could be used as a hermeneutic to read a biblical text. Questions such as: Can *taofiofi* or is it possible that *taofiofi* be used as a hermeneutic to read a biblical text? If this is possible, then what sort of understanding that *taofiofi* could help me or any Samoan to further our knowledge and understanding of a passage from the bible? These are some of the questions that I want to ask and hopefully to find answers when reading texts of the bible from my Samoan perspective.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

Given the above, the following research is therefore an attempt to read and interpret a particular biblical text from a Samoan perspective, namely, *taofiofi* perspective. The general aim is to highlight the contribution of local and contextual concepts and traditions in biblical interpretations. The questions raised above will lead this exploration of the biblical text. *Taofiofi* will be explored and analyzed, and used to re-read the selected biblical text.

The selection of Ruth 1:6-18 is intentional and I will explain it more below. Ruth 1:6-18 is a well-known part of the story of Naomi and Ruth. Most interpretations highlight Ruth's devoted love for Naomi as the main theological theme and message for this text.¹ This is especially seen in Ruth's insistence to not accept Naomi's command for her to go back to her people and family. She also reassures Naomi of her commitment to her by severing all her connections to family and people, and even her gods.

In other words, this thesis will attempt to provide an alternative reading of this passage from my Samoan perspective. It is the hypothesis of this work that

¹ Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, WBC Vol 9 (Zondervan: Grand Rapids Michigan, 1996), 87.

Ruth's confession to Naomi could be interpreted not only as a commitment of love (as it is generally accepted) but also as a way to resist accepted norms or policies behind the book's social and historical context. It is the second part above that will be the main focus of the thesis. I will use *taofiofi* as a postcolonial tool to highlight and explore this further. This will be discussed more in detail later in the thesis.

In the end, hopefully an alternative reading of this dialogue between Ruth and Naomi from my *Samoan* context is possible. Moreover, I also hope this reading will be relevant to members of the *EFKS* and their faith journey. In other words, this alternative reading will hope to encourage the *EFKS* members to embrace their own Samoan concepts and traditions in reading and understanding the bible. Lastly, this alternative reading will contribute, even if it is in a small way, to what is now called Island Readings and further studies of the bible from one's own island context.

1.3 Text Selection- Ruth 1:6-18

Ruth 1:6-18 is really interesting because of how this foreign woman was willing to commit herself to take care of her mother-in-law. From a Samoan perspective, a daughter-in-law or *nofo tane* normally has a hard life especially

when she decides to live with her husband's family. Also, it is more difficult if the daughter-in-law is a foreigner as well. It is in this light that I wanted to explore this passage and see why this foreign woman insisted to go with her mother-in-law although she knows the difficult situation ahead of her decision. In terms of *taofiofi*, I could understand Naomi's insistence for Ruth to go back to her family and people. Naomi knows that the future of Ruth with her is not bright especially with both of their husbands had passed on. Also, Naomi has no more son alive and even Ruth is childless from her marriage. Regarding Israelite society, widowers will find life difficult without husbands, fathers, and sons, especially in terms of land ownership. In other words, without land, there will be no food supply and harvest to sell for everyday necessities. So one's everyday need will depend on working for other land owners, and working to provide for the family is also a man's duty in Israelite society.

However, from Ruth's perspective, it is hard to comprehend her *taofiofi* of Naomi. Since, from a Samoan perspective, it is like Ruth opting to leave a good life (at her own family) and move into a hard one (family with in-laws). The thought of a *nofo tane* who willingly want to stay with her in-laws, even though she had no children, is frowned upon in the Samoan society. It is in this regard that I want to explore more from the *taofiofi* perspective why Ruth's decision to leave everything and go with Naomi.

Given the above, the following research is therefore an attempt to read and interpret a particular biblical text from a Samoan perspective, namely, *taofiofi* perspective. The general aim is to highlight the contribution of local and contextual concepts and traditions in biblical interpretations. The questions raised above will lead this exploration of the biblical text. *Taofiofi* will be explored and analyzed, and used to re-read the selected biblical text.

1.4 Thesis Structure

To fulfil the above task, the thesis will be structured as follows. Chapter one serves as the introduction to the thesis. It will briefly state and explain the aim and purpose of the study, the hermeneutic and method used, and the individual chapters and what they are set out to do.

Chapter two will focus mainly on the hermeneutic and methodology. It will outline my hermeneutic, namely *taofiofi*, that is, it will explain its origin and meaning, and how it will be used as a hermeneutic. Also, I will discuss some aspects of *taofiofi* that will be further used as hermeneutical lens. A discussion of Historical Criticism as a tool in our exegesis and analysis of the biblical text will follow. Finally, I will discuss intentional hybridity as a postcolonial aspect and argue that *taofiofi* is a form of intentional hybridity. The chapter will end with a

summary of the preceding discussion in the chapter and how this discussion leads to the next chapter.

Chapter three will focus on the biblical text of Ruth 1:6-18. Firstly, I will give an overview of the Book of Ruth. Giving reference to its place in the Hebrew Bible and Christian Bible, a brief plot of the narrative, and the book's historical background. This background will be used in the interpretation and exegesis that follows. Secondly, the exegetical work on the text will be done. The exegesis will utilize Historical Criticism and *taofiofi* hermeneutics from a postcolonial perspective. A summary of the work attempted will end the chapter.

Chapter Four will serve as the conclusion of the thesis. It will be a summary of the *taofiofi* reading together with the conclusions reached. Moreover, it will also assess whether the conclusions have addressed or answer questions raised in the beginning of the thesis. Furthermore, it will see how this reading may help Samoans and members of the *EFKS* in their understanding of the bible. Finally, it will acknowledge some contributions of this reading to Island Reading Approach in general and also how this work may contribute to further studies of the Book of Ruth.

CHAPTER 2: HERMENEUTIC AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter will discuss my proposed hermeneutic and methodology. It will be in a threefold discussion. Firstly, I will discuss *Taofiofi* as a hermeneutic. Definitions and explanations of *taofiofi* and some aspects of *taofiofi* that will be used as lens will be given. Secondly, I will briefly discuss the postcolonial perspective which will also be utilized in my reading of the text. Finally, I will give a brief discussion of historical criticism and how it will be used as a tool to my reading of the text.

2.1 *Taofiofi* as a Hermeneutic

Taofiofi is a Samoan word that derives from the root word *taofi* which means to stop, retain, or to hold on.¹ The addition of the second ‘*ofi*’ reflects the act of *taofi* to be a continuous act. Therefore, *taofiofi* is simply a continuous act of stopping or holding on for a long period of time. In other words, *taofiofi* is

¹ Rev George Pratt, *A Grammar of the Samoan Language* (Matautu London Missionary Society Press, January 1861), 188.

basically trying to put a stop or a limit to the freedom of someone in expressing what they know, what they say, or what they want to do.

Taofiofi could be understood as a form of teaching and learning. It helps someone to hold back, to be patient, to be observant, and to take in what he or she must learn before expressing themselves. However, it could also be understood as a form of oppression, control, and corruption especially when expressed by the one who has power over the other. Therefore, the positives and negatives of *taofiofi* could be relative depending on the perspective, status, and characteristics of the persons involved.

The following experiences will further highlight the above possibilities of understanding *taofiofi*.

2.1.1 MTC Student Experience

For a personal example, *taofiofi* is a common word that is often heard in our MTC context, especially within the fellowship of the student body. The final year students usually use *taofiofi* as a form of advice towards the new comers to not overly keen to express themselves in whatever capacity until they have observed, understood, and knew what to do, how to do, and why they do things here in the

College. For the final year students, *taofiofi* helps to form good character and to master leadership qualities such as humility (*loto mauualalo; aga malū*), humour (*tausua mālie*), respect (*ava; fa'aaloalo*), courage (*loto tele; loto toa*), integrity (*fuā amiotonu*) and cultural competence (*le agava'a i aganu'u*).²

Practicing *taofiofi*, especially from the point of view of the new comers, is difficult because of a person's natural instincts. That is, the new comers see *taofiofi* as a form of control, oppression and exploitation of their rights. It constrains their freedom of speech and expression. For most of them, *taofiofi* is unchristian. Also, they interpret *taofiofi* as a license for the final year students to say whatever they want to say whether it is hurtful and harmful to others.

However, from a final year student's perspective, a mark of a good leader lies in his or her ability to maintain *taofiofi* under any circumstances. Also, all these teaching and learning through *taofiofi* would be much clearer and apparent when the newcomers reached the final years of their studies as well.

In this paper, I will mainly look at *taofiofi* in which it helps liberates, teaches, and develops a person both physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

² Dr Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi, "Le Tofa Taofiofi: The Wisdom of Restraint," Samoa Observer Press, www.samoaoobserver.ws.

2.1.2 Samoan Cultural Context

Taofiofi could also be seen within the Samoan cultural settings as well. The relationship between the *matai* and the *taule'ale'a* (untitled man), who is also known as the *tautua*,³ highlights *taofiofi* practice as well. A good *tautua* emphasizes obedience and honesty in performing his roles and duties for the *matai*. He should not, under any circumstances, disobey or talk back to the *matai*. This relationship originates a famous Samoan proverb, *O le ala i le pule o le tautua*. (The path to authority is service).⁴ In other words, a good *tautua* will definitely end up as a *matai* or family chief. In light of *taofiofi*, it is a good characteristic to have for any *tautua* in order to achieve his goal of one day becoming a good *matai*.

³ *Tautua* is usually translated as service rendered. Also, the person performing the service is called a *tautua* as well.

⁴ Makesi Neemia, "The Priestly Ger (Alien) Meets the Samoan Tagata Ese (Outsider)," in *Sea of Readings (the Bible in the South Pacific)*, ed. Jione Havea (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 147-61.

2.2 Some Aspects of *Taofiofi* as Hermeneutical Lens

2.2.1 *Fautuaga*

One of the obvious aspects of *taofiofi* is *fautuaga*. According to Milner, *fautuaga* is a noun which means recommendation or advice. It is usually offered by one person to another especially regarding important matters that need to be done. *Fautuaga* is usually based on the wisdom and experience of the one giving out the advice. Thus, *taofiofi* can be a *fautuaga* to someone not to overreact but to stay calm and to be composed in any situation.

The meaning of *fautuaga* can also be made apparent with a closer analysis of the word *fautua* which is the root word for *fautuaga*. *Fautua* is a verb but when the suffixed 'ga' is added, it then becomes a noun. *Fautua* consists of two small words, *fau* (build) and *tua* (back). Therefore, advice is literally something that is built from the back, perhaps from the back of one's mind. In other words, advice takes time and requires privacy in order for a person to meditate and think it through before voicing it. The *fautuaga* aspect of *taofiofi* relates to the good qualities already mentioned above, such as humility (*loto maualalo; aga malū*), humour (*tausua malie*), respect (*ava; fa'aaloalo*), courage (*loto tele; lotu toa*), integrity (*fuā amiotonu*) and cultural competence (*le agava'a i aganu'u*).

Fautuaga can also be understood as a warning. In cases where a *fautuaga* is constantly given but not heeded, then the next *fautuaga* to the same person on the same issue is synonymous to a *lapataiga* or a warning. It becomes a strong *fautuaga* to someone, warning them that there will be consequences if he or she disregards the advice again.

2.2.2 Taulaga

Another important and relevant aspect of my *taofiofi* hermeneutic is *taulaga*. According to George Pratt, *taulaga* means a sacred offering.⁵ A similar meaning is also given by Milner with a further explanation that this offering is done by the priest in a church setting.⁶ Usually this meaning of *taulaga* refers to material things such as food and money. However, *taulaga* has also been used to refer to a person's efforts and time given to the benefit of another person, or family, or more commonly to the church. This meaning of *taulaga* is apparent in the *taofiofi* hermeneutic. It explains the will or ability of someone who tries to stop himself or herself from reacting to something as an offering or sacrifice. The person doing the *taofiofi* is simply offering themselves for the good of others. Although the definitions

⁵ Pratt, *A Grammar of the Samoan Language*, 191.

⁶ G. B. Milner, *Samoan Dictionary (Samoan-English, English-Samoa)* (Auckland, New Zealand Pasifika Press Ltd, 1993), 245.

given by both Pratt and Milner highlight the offering as a sacred offering, which implies a religious or church setting, the act of offering and sacrificing a person's comfort for the betterment of another person is commonly experienced in the everyday social reality of the community as well.

2.2.3 *Fa'asa'oloto*

Fa'asa'oloto is a verb that comes from the combination of two words, *fa'a* and *sa'oloto*. According to George Pratt, *sa'oloto* is a verb that means "to be at liberty, to have freedom."⁷ On the term *fa'a*, Pratt says, it is a causative prefix.⁸ Therefore, given the above meanings by Pratt of the two words, *fa'asa'oloto* can be taken as, 'to cause liberty or freedom'. Milner also gives a similar meaning of *saoloto*, 'to set free or release.'⁹ Therefore, *fa'asa'oloto* is simply an act of trying to give someone the power or right to act, speak or think freely; it implies a state of not being imprisoned or enslaved. Perhaps it could also stand for something greater than just the right or power to act but also securing everyone an equal opportunity in life.

⁷ Pratt, *A Grammar of the Samoan Language*, 173.

⁸ Ibid., 100.

⁹ Milner, *Samoan Dictionary (Samoan-English, English-Samoa)*, 201.

From the perspective of the *taofiofi* hermeneutic, *fa'asa'oloto* is one of the main reasons why someone needs to *taofiofi*. A person needs to find the right time and place for the act to liberate someone to be more effective. The environment and surrounding must be right in order for the *fa'asa'oloto* act to be successful; hence, the need to *taofiofi*.

2.2.4 *Tete'e*

Pratt and Milner share a similar meaning for *tete'e*. They both see *tete'e* as an act to refuse, to reject or to oppose.¹⁰ Therefore, it is also an act of resistance or rebellion against something that is attacking you, or refusing to accept something that you do not like. *Tete'e* could be in a form of physical actions against those you oppose, or in a verbal or written form. Some *tete'e* are obvious but others are more subtle and hard to identify. In other words, *taofiofi* is simply a way of showing resistance or *tete'e* but in a more subtle or silent way. Probably the Samoan word *tete'e fa'aleiloga*¹¹ would be more appropriate in this sense.

¹⁰ Pratt, *A Grammar of the Samoan Language*, 260.

¹¹ *fa'aleiloga* literally means 'not obvious' or 'not easy to see.'

2.2.5 *Tautua*

The last aspect of *taofiofi* that is relevant to my hermeneutic is *tautua*. *Tautua* is commonly translated as service or service rendered by someone. Moreover, the one rendering the service is also called the *tautua*. *Tautua* is more than an attitude amongst Samoans; “it is a value that is highly prized, and brings prestige to a family because it is a duty and responsibility carried out to honour one’s family or *aiga*.”¹²

In the Samoan context, *tautua* is critical to attaining a chiefly title or becoming a *matai* of the *aiga* or family. Getting a *matai* title or becoming a *matai* brings power, status and prestige to the titleholder. That is why most of our young people especially male ones strive to become one. However, aspiring ones need to render the appropriate *tautua* to the current holder of the *matai* title, the family, church and village in order for them to have a good chance of achieving their goal and become the successor to the title. As also alluded by Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *tautua*

¹² Sarafina Sanerivi, "Tautua," <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/32260>.

“is a family-based social and cultural status, role, value, and practice, which view the needs, rights, and roles of people in the family and community as primary.”¹³

As already mentioned above, *taofiofi* is very critical for a *tautua* in providing his service or *tautua*. He needs to withhold all his critiques and opinions about the *matai* and his leadership to himself but serve him in the best of his ability. He needs to provide the “*tautua tuavae, tautua toto, tautua matavela*”¹⁴ if he wants to succeed the title.

2.3 Postcolonial Perspective

As alluded by Peter H. W. Lau, he agrees to what Bradley Cromwell notes about the current trend in Hebrew Bible studies especially in how to apply Postcolonialism. Cromwell suggests that this trend is to apply Postcolonialism in three ways:

¹³ Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 34.

¹⁴ *Tautua tuavae* refers to the person (*taule'ale'a*) who serves the daily need of the *matai* or chief. *Tautua toto* describes the kind of service that a *taule'ale'a* does to protect his *matai*. *Tautua matavela* is the literal description that highlights a *taule'ale'a* or *tautua* who faces the heat of the fire while cooking for the *matai*. All these forms of *tautua* highlight the very good service a person (usually a *taule'ale'a*) renders. *Tautua pa'ō* and *tautua gutua* are terms given to those who do not give a good service

(1) The role of empires and reactions to them in the composition of Hebrew Bible texts.

(2) How colonial empires interpreted the Hebrew Bible and how indigenous populations reacted to colonial interpretations.

(3) Interpretations from previously colonised populations.¹⁵

My approach here follows point (3) above, where I will use a Samoan concept of *taofiofi* as a hermeneutic to read a passage from the Book of Ruth.¹⁶ However, it may also overlap with the first two ways above especially number (2).

¹⁵ Bradley L. Crowell, *Postcolonial Studies and Hebrew Bible* (Drake University, Des Moines, IA: SAGE, 2009), 214-44. Cited by Peter H W. Lau "Another Postcolonial Reading of the Book of Ruth" in Jione Havea and Peter H W. Lau (eds) *Reading Ruth in Asia*, 2015, 15

¹⁶ Some of the Samoan Biblical Scholars who have used this approach on other texts include; Martin Wilson Mariota, "Moses, Both Hebrew and Egyptian: A Samoan Palagi Reading of Exodus 2-3," in *Sea of Readings: The Bible in the South Pacific*, ed. Jione Havea (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 103-15; Neemia, "The Priestly Ger (Alien) Meets the Samoan Tagata Ese (Outsider)," 147-61; Vaitusi Nofoaiga, "Jesus the Fiaola (Opportunity Seeker) a Postcolonial Samoan Reading of Matthew 7:24-8:22," *ibid.* (Houston Mill Road, Atlanta, USA), 163-77; Brian Fiu Kolia, "Lifting the Tapu of Sex: A Tulou Reading of the Song of Songs," in *Sea of Readings: The Bible in the South Pacific*, ed. Jione Havea (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 85-102; Peni Leota, "Ethnic Tensions in Persian-Period Yehud: A Samoan Postcolonial Hermeneutic," (Melbourne College of Divinity: PhD Thesis, 2005); Arthur John. Wulf, "Was Earth Created Good? Reappraising Earth in Genesis 1:1-2:4a from a Samoan Perspective" (PhD Thesis, University of Auckland 2016). Leota, Nofoaiga, Mariota, and Neemia explicitly use postcolonial perspective while Wulf and Kolia attempted readings using Samoan concepts.

2.3.1 Intentional Hybridity

One postcolonial concept that I will be utilising in my reading is intentional hybridity. Mark Brett uses intentional hybridity in his study of the Book of Genesis,¹⁷ Brett argues that the final editors of the Book of Genesis (during the Persian period) use intentional hybridity in their composition or final compilation of the Book of Genesis to undermine the ideology of ‘the holy seed’ advocated by Ezra and Nehemiah during the restoration period.

For Brett,

“Intentional hybridity is a blending of two or more voices, without compositional boundaries being evident, such that the voices combine into an unstable chorale – sometimes speaking univocally, but more often juxtaposing alternative points of view such that the authority of the dominant voice is put into question.”¹⁸

I will argue that Ruth 1:6-18 reflects this intentional hybridity. That is, there are two existing but conflicting voices that are juxtaposed in this text. It is in this

¹⁷ Mark G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁸ Brett, *Genesis*, 22. For Brett, he stated that this term is borrowed from Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 358-361. Also see Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).

regard that I also see *taofiofi* as intentional hybridity.¹⁹ This will be elaborated upon below in my *taofiofi* reading.

2.4 Historical Criticism

The final part of my methodology which I will use as a tool to further analyse the text is, Historical Criticism. Historical Criticism is basically interested in the world behind the text. The world behind the text considers the historical, social and cultural backgrounds in which a text was written, and which might have motivated its composition.²⁰

This paper will situate the Book of Ruth in the context of the post exilic period, especially the Persian period as accepted by scholars today.²¹ The historical context will be further explained in the next chapter, that is, it will

¹⁹ Sin-lung Tong, "The Key to Successful Migration? Rereading Ruth's Confession (1:16-17) through the Lens of Bhabha's Mimicry," in *Reading in Asia*, ed. Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 35-46.

²⁰ W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach 3rd Edition* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 2-4. For a more detailed discussion of Historical Criticism, see, John Hayes and Carl R. Halladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginners Handbook 3rd Edition* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2007), 53-61. See also, J. Maxwell Miller, "Reading the Bible Historically," in *To Each Its Own Meaning*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 17-22.

²¹ John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible "the Writings"*, 3 ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 529-33. Also see Mark G. Brett, *Decolonising God: The Bible in the Tides of Empire* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 118-19.

explain the issues involved in this period and how the text's composition was motivated by these circumstances.

Summary

This chapter outlines my hermeneutic and method of reading that I will utilize in assessing the biblical text of Ruth 1:6-18. My Samoan hermeneutic of *taofiofi* evaluates the biblical text with aspects of *taofiofi* as lens. From a postcolonial perspective, I see *taofiofi* as intentional hybridity and I will further explain this in my *taofiofi* reading. Finally, the historical background of the text will further illuminate the significance of my *taofiofi* reading of the passage. It is with this basis that I will endeavour a *taofiofi* reading of Ruth 1:6-18 in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: A *TAOFIOFI* READING OF RUTH 1:6-18

Introduction

This chapter I will attempt a *Taofiofi* reading of Ruth 1:6-18 by utilizing my Samoan hermeneutic and methodology outlined and discussed in the preceding chapter. Hopefully, it will give an alternative understanding of the text that may help Samoan readers appreciate our traditions and concepts in reading and understanding biblical texts. Moreover, this reading may also be seen as a small contribution in our attempt in doing Island Criticism.

3.1 The Book of Ruth – A brief overview

The Book of Ruth is both included in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Canon. However, its placing in these canons are different. In the Hebrew Bible, Ruth is listed in the last section called the Writings.¹ Within the Writings, the

¹ The Hebrew Bible is divided into three major sections. Torah, Neviim (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). This is commonly known as TaNaK, the acronym for the three major parts.

Book of Ruth is included in the collection known as the five *megilloth* (scrolls).²

The order in the *megilloth* is arranged chronologically or liturgically.

Chronologically, it is Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Esther.

Liturgically, the order is in accordance with the sequence of Jewish festivals. Hence, Song of Songs (Passover), Ruth (Weeks; *Shabuoth*, Pentecost), Lamentations (the 9th Ab.), Ecclesiastes (Sukkoth; Booths) and Esther (Purim).

The Christian Bible lists Ruth as part of the Historical Books between the Book of Judges and the Book of 1 Samuel.³

The placing in each canon perhaps reflects the different emphasis of the Jews and Christians on the significance of the Book of Ruth. The placing in the Hebrew Bible implies Ruth's late composition and probably because of its genre (a kind of fictional short story) which is different from those in the prophetic and

² H. Eldon Clem, "Megilloth," in *ABD* ed. David Noel Freedman and Gary A. Herion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 680.

³ Lawrence Boadt, *Reading the Old Testament: An Introduction* Second Edition Revised and updated by Richard Clifford and Daniel Harrington (New York: Paulist Press, 2012), 1-14. Also see John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 1-7.

Torah section. The Christian tradition places Ruth according to the historical period of the Judges and just before the monarchy. This placement sits well with the period narrated in the beginning of the book which is the time of Judges and its ending where Ruth gives birth to a son named Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of Israel's great King David.

3.2 A brief plot

The Book of Ruth narrates the story of an Israelite family who left Israel for Moab to seek refuge from a famine. The Israelite couple, Naomi and Elimelech, have two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. The two boys married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah respectively. After ten years, Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion all passed away leaving only the three women without any children. After hearing that the famine has passed in Israel, Naomi now decides to return home. However, she wants to go home alone, so she encourages her daughters in law to go back to their families and to seek out future husbands from their people. Instead the daughters in law insisted that they all go to Bethlehem with Naomi even though Naomi told them not to. Eventually Orpah gave in to Naomi's constant request and left to go back to her family and people; however, Ruth remained steadfast in her plea to go with Naomi. In the end Naomi agrees and allows Ruth to accompany her home. The women both know the difficult situation they will face back in Israel because

they are both widows. They persevere and Ruth finally marries Boaz a kinsman of Elimelech. Through this marriage, Elimelech's (and Naomi's) inheritance was redeemed through Boaz and Ruth. Naomi also bore a son through Ruth, a Moabite, and he became the grandfather of David, the greatest King of Israel.

3.3 Historical Background

The actual date of the Book of Ruth is continuously being disputed. A number of proposals have been put forward. An early date around the time of Solomon has been proposed based on the importance of the genealogy of David in the Book of Ruth. However, at the other end of the spectrum, a post exilic dating has also been proposed, focusing on the marriage of an Israelite and a Moabite woman. In this regard, the story of Ruth serves as a polemic against the strict rule and rejection of marriage to a foreign woman by EN and the golah community.⁴

The placement of the Book of Ruth in the Writings, the third major section of the Hebrew Bible, perhaps lends some support to this view since many of the Writings are dated from the post exilic period.

⁴ Andre LaCocque, *"Ruth, in the Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition"* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 84-116.

I will also share this view and situate the Book of Ruth in this period. Moreover, I will look at this story as a polemic against Ezra's policies regarding intermarriage with foreign women. In this light, I will endeavour to use my *taofiofi* reading to highlight this background.

3.4 A *Taofiofi* Reading of Ruth 1:6-18

The primary focus in this endeavor is to access the biblical text using the aspects of *taofiofi* listed above in Section 2.2 as a hermeneutical lenses to re-read the text and apply the intentional hybridity perspective in it as well. This assessment will then be evaluated and hopefully it will give a *taofiofi* reading or interpretation of the biblical text.

3.4.1 *Fautuaga*

The main focus in this section is to see whether our text resembles *fautuaga*. In verses 6 to 14, Naomi clearly gave her two daughters' in law a *fautuaga*. From her experience, as a mother, and as someone who knows the traditions and laws of her people, especially regarding Levirate marriage,⁵ she advises her daughters in

⁵ See Deuteronomy 25:5-6

law to go back to their mothers' house. Naomi fully knows that she cannot maintain this Levirate law because of her age. Therefore, she releases her daughters in law from their obligations to this law. She even blesses them and wishes them well if they were to find new husbands (v.8). Moreover, a widow has nothing else to offer them; so Naomi is basically saying, they have little or no hope with her. Even if they returned to Israel with her, it will be a life of poverty, destitution, and an empty and bleak future.⁶ In this regard, Naomi is advising Ruth and Orpah to *taofiofi* their willingness to leave with her because it just would not be practical for them to leave together.

In verse 8 the use of the Hebrew word שְׁבִנָּה which is from the root word שׁוּב meaning return,⁷ is used in the form of an imperative. Therefore, Naomi is giving a *fautuaga* in the form of a command or probably a warning (*lapataiga*) for the two women to return to their families. Similarly, I would suggest, in verse 16 and 17, that Ruth's reply is a *fautuaga* for Naomi to *taofiofi* her insistence to make her leave. "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you!" (v. 16) clearly highlights *fautuaga* where Ruth "is indignant because Naomi is urging

⁶ Gary M. Burge and Andrew E. Hill, eds., *BIBC* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2012), 246-48.

⁷ F. Brown, S. Driver and C. Briggs, *BDB Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 2015), 996.

her to abandon her present loyalties and to turn her back on her previous commitments.”⁸ The use of שׁוּב⁹ here is in the Qal infinity resembling Naomi’s insistence for Ruth and Orpah to return home. In other words, it seems that Ruth is giving a warning to Naomi to stop and consider what she did for her and her sons. Ruth wants Naomi to think of her loyalty to them while her husband was alive. For Ruth, her loyalty never wavered, and especially, now that Naomi is the only one left. Ruth has given a firm *fautuaga* to Naomi, to look back to when they were a family, so she can accept her and Orpah to go with her.

Given the historical context assumed in this work, Naomi’s *fautuaga* can be interpreted as the voice of the golah community or EN. While Ruth’s voice represents those who oppose EN policies. Naomi’s insistence for Ruth (and Orpah) to leave her because they will have no future with her in Israel resembles the ban of foreign women in EN. On the other hand, Ruth’s commitment to cling to Naomi resembles the opposing view to EN. Ruth’s confession in this text could be interpreted as a counter claim that foreign women will bring blessings to the Israelites. In this regard, *taofiofi* as *fautuaga* is an intentional hybridity.

⁸ Kathleen A. Robertson, *The Book of Ruth (NIB)*, 12 vols., vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 908.

⁹ F. Brown, *BDB*, 996.

3.4.2 *Taulaga*

From the discussion of *taulaga* in 2.2.2, two aspects come to light; firstly, *taulaga* is an offering performed willingly by a person. Secondly, this *taulaga* by a willing person is for the betterment of another person, without concern of his or her own welfare.

Ruth's plea in verses 17 and 18 resembles both aspects mentioned above. Her willingness to abandon everything about her, such as her people, her land, her identity, and her gods, for the sake of Naomi is a *taulaga*. In other words, Ruth is offering her whole person to look after her mother in law without worrying about the consequences.

Ruth knows very well how hard to fulfil her plea. She is a Moabite, who is considered an outsider or foreigner within Israelite society. She would most certainly be treated as an outcast in Israel because of her status as a foreigner, a widow and a woman. However, knowing all of this, she remains loyal to Naomi and sacrifices everything in order to go with Naomi. Moreover, Ruth knows of the bitter history shared between her nation and Israel, but she is willing to take risks with Naomi anyway. Her determination to remain with Naomi tells us much about her character and her love for her mother-in-law.

The integration of foreigners into Israelite community became possible and common during the post exilic period. This is especially highlighted in some of the Holiness/Priestly laws regarding cultic and ritual practices, which have now accommodated both the native and the Foreigner.¹⁰ In these laws, the foreigners or immigrants are now “allowed to assimilate under certain conditions (see Exodus 12:48-49).”¹¹

In light of this, Ruth’s *taulaga* looks possible but she still needs to commit herself to Naomi. This should be seen in severing herself totally from her traditions and especially her gods in order to be assimilated into Naomi’s society.

Ruth’s confession to reaffirm her commitment to Naomi is a counter claim to how Naomi has been demanding her to leave. Given the issues behind the text, Ruth’s *taofiofi* through *taulaga* or sacrifice, by offering herself to look after Naomi, is an act which opposes the issue of banning foreign marriages. Through

¹⁰ Christopher Nihan, “Resident Aliens and Natives in the Holiness Legislations” in *the Foreigner and the Law: Perspectives from the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, (Eds) Reinhard Achenbach, Rainer Albertz and Jakob Wöhrle (BZAR 16, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 121-129. Also see Mark Brett, “Natives and Immigrants in the Social Imagination of the Holiness School”, in *Imagining the other and Constructing Israelite Identity in the Early Second Temple Period*. (eds) Ehud Ben Zvi and Diana V. Edelman (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 101.

¹¹ Makesi Neemia, “The Hebrew Bible and Postcolonial Samoan Hermeneutics” in *Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial Theologies: Story weaving in the Asia Pacific*, (Eds) Mark G. Brett and Jione Havea (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 71.

Ruth's *taulaga* it dismisses the claim that foreign women affected the holy seed. However, foreign women, like Ruth, are committed and loyal people who will bring blessings to unfortunate Israelite people like Naomi.

3.4.3 *Fa'asa'oloto*

Taking Naomi's perspective, *fa'asa'oloto* seems obvious. Naomi in her insistence to let go of her daughters in law resembles *fa'asa'oloto*. She is now setting Orpah and Ruth free from any obligations to her even under Levirate marriage law (vv. 8-15). Moreover, in verse 9, Naomi wants them to find rest *מְנוּחָה*.¹² In other words, Naomi wants to take away the burden of feeling responsible for her welfare. Also, the reference to 'the house of your husband' implies that Naomi encourages the two women to seek new husbands. Only through their new husbands will they find security again. "Naomi hereby expresses concern that her daughters-in-law be spared a life of restlessness and wandering and that they find a home in which they enjoy peace, permanence, and the satisfaction of having their daily needs met".¹³

¹² F. Brown, *BDB*, 584.

¹³ Daniel I. Block, *TNAC (an Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture) Judges & Ruth*, vol. 6 (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers 1999), 634.

However, from Orpah and Ruth's perspective (especially Ruth) a question emerges, 'does Ruth's plea to Naomi resemble *fa'asa'oloto*? To address this question, we need to ask another question, 'is there something that Naomi needs to be free from?' If the answer is yes, then what is this? How is Ruth able to *fa'asa'oloto* Naomi from it?

The implication from Ruth's plea emphasizes Naomi's situation, that is, where Naomi will go, where Naomi will lodge, who are Naomi's people and God, where will she die and be buried. Ruth's overall plea implies, in my opinion, Naomi's concerns. All these concerns have imprisoned Naomi, and Ruth wants to *fa'asa'oloto* her to be free from them. Therefore, her plea will liberate Naomi from her insecurities about going home alone, from no one to rely on when she gets home, and of the possibility of rejection by her own people. Ruth, in her plea, guarantees Naomi that she will be by her side wherever they may go and whatever trials life will bring.

Ruth's embracing of Naomi's people and especially her God would free Naomi, I would suggest, of the burden regarding Ruth's paganism and ethnicity. She might have been worried that Ruth's paganism and otherness will be a hindrance to her or them when they return to Bethlehem. Ruth now declares her intention of cutting ties with her Moabite connections and be totally immersed into

being an Israelite. This commitment and confession of Ruth “relieves Naomi from feeling responsible for the unknown fate that will follow upon Ruth’s going with her.”¹⁴

From a *taofiofi* perspective, Ruth’s commitment to Naomi is a way for her to *fa’asa’oloto* Naomi from her traditional beliefs. In light of the issues of banning foreign women, Naomi’s conviction that Ruth does not have any future or a life in Israel reflects EN’s policies. Therefore, foreign women should be banned from Judah and be allowed to go back to their country and people. However, Ruth’s persistence to not let go of Naomi implies a counter claim to the policies of EN and the willingness of the opposition to *fa’asa’oloto* the rest of the people of Judah from the exclusive policies of EN.

3.4.4 *Tete’e*

The dialogue (vv. 8-18) between Naomi and her daughters in law highlights *tete’e* from both sides. Naomi opposes the proposal of the daughters in law to go with her to Bethlehem. Similarly, Orpah and Ruth rejected Naomi’s persistence for

¹⁴ Bush, *Ruth/Esther*, WBC, 87.

them to return to their people. However, Orpah gave in and returned to her people but Ruth insisted on staying with Naomi.

In verse 16, Ruth speaks for the first time in the story, the three main verbs in this verse intensifies the mindset in Ruth's *tete'e* to Naomi. The use of the word **אֶל-תִּפְגַּעִי** (*not attack, entreat, encounter with, press*),¹⁵ **לְעֹזֶבְךָ** (*to leave, to be left, to repair*),¹⁶ and **לָשׁוּב** (*to return, turn back*)¹⁷ suggest that Ruth senses Naomi has become aggressive in her approach. So, Ruth returns a bold and strong *tete'e*, perhaps out of frustration, to Naomi advising her to stop telling to leave her.

Furthermore, in verse 14, Ruth is described as clinging to Naomi when Orpah returned. The word **רִבַּק** (*clung*)¹⁸ is also used in Genesis 2:24 expressing what the man will do in her relationship with the woman.¹⁹ Therefore, Ruth perhaps is clinging to Naomi like a husband to a wife. Ruth's plea implies that she would provide and look after Naomi like a husband would do to his wife. Perhaps

¹⁵ This word comes from the root word **פגע** meaning 'to attack, encounter: F. Brown, *BDB*, 803.

¹⁶ This word comes from the root word **עזב** meaning 'to leave, to be left, to repair: *ibid.*, 736.

¹⁷ This word comes from the root word **שוב** meaning 'to return, turn back.' *ibid.*, 996.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁹ Genesis 2:24 culminates the creation of the woman from the man's rib. It also implies what the man should do in his relationship with the woman. The man will leave his family and clings to the woman for they are now one body. This text is usually read and interpreted during wedding vows and services.

Ruth is *tete'e* to Naomi's claim that she can provide anything for them if they go to her home land.

In verse 16, Ruth rejects Naomi's request for her to turn back and go back to her people and place of birth, Moab. The use of עִזַּב (leave or abandon)²⁰ and שׁוּב (return)²¹ shows Ruth's concern for Naomi. She knows that returning to Moab would mean abandoning Naomi and leaving her even more vulnerable than she already was. In that regard, Ruth was prepared to leave everything in Moab and go with Naomi.²²

Interestingly, Ruth swears to follow Naomi and her God. She also swears that not even death will separate her from Naomi. In taking such an oath, Ruth defies all conventions and takes an enormous risk. She risks mockery and rejection from her adopted people, who traditionally hate all Moabites. She puts her future in the hands of the God of Israel, thus implicitly claiming that Israel's God will watch over and show mercy to a foreigner. The God that she first knew from her

²⁰ F. Brown, *BDB*, 736.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 996.

²² Dina Coopersmith, "The Book of Ruth: A Crash Course," <http://www.aish.com/h/sh/t/48972136.html?mobile=yes>.

mother-in-law, the God that kept Naomi alive after all the hardships she went through.

Ruth's confession to reaffirm her commitment to Naomi is a counter claim to Naomi's demand for her to leave. Given the issues behind the text, Ruth's *taofiofi* through *taulaga* or sacrifice, by offering herself to look after Naomi, is an act to oppose the issue of banning foreign marriages. Through Ruth's *taulaga* it dismisses the claim that foreign women affect the holy seed. However, foreign women, like Ruth, are committed and loyal people that will bring blessings to unfortunate Israelite people like Naomi.

3.4.5 Tautua

To render a good *tautua* a Samoan must be committed to serving the *matai* or high chief of the family. Attending to the daily needs of the *matai*, like doing the cooking, providing funds and labour towards the *matai*'s contributions to the village council, church, and extended family especially for *fa'alavelave*.²³ In this regard, there are two main aspects of a good *tautua* or *tautua* in general that I want to highlight here, they are commitment and providence.

²³ *Fa'alavelave* general means obligations within the extended family, church, or village. For examples, funerals, *matai* title bestowments, church and village developments, and so forth.

In Ruth's reply to Naomi's request, we can see these two *tautua* aspects. In her plea to be on Naomi's side until death reflects commitment. She had the chance to leave, but she honoured her commitment to her mother-in-law. This is the type of *tautua matavela* in the Samoan context that an untitled man or *taule'ale'a* will do in order to get the blessings from the *matai*.

In the text, Ruth did not show anything but love for her mother-in-law. In the rest of verse 16, we find words which are among the most memorable and well-known words in the Old Testament. This speech can be divided into three major parts: a plea (in the imperative) for Naomi not to try to change Ruth's mind, a threefold declaration of commitment to Naomi, and a final oath.²⁴

Ruth, in her threefold declaration of commitment, is determined to accompany Naomi for the rest of her life. With the expressions, "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge." Ruth perhaps is saying, that she is willing to share the good and bad times with Naomi not only in the past but for the future as well.²⁵

²⁴ Kathleen A. Robertson Farmer, "The Book of Ruth," in *NIB(a Commentary in Twelve Volumes)*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 907.

²⁵ Robertson, *The Book of Ruth (the New Interpreter's Bible)*, 2, 908.

Moreover, Ruth's commitment to follow Naomi to death and also to her burial place, shows how she now considers herself as true family to Naomi. Some scholars see this declaration as a sign of conversion but some also see it as "an affirmation of a transfer of membership from the people of Moab to Israel and of allegiance from Chemosh to Yahweh."²⁶

Finally, Ruth takes an oath "May the Lord do this and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" This is an interesting development since Ruth now makes an oath in the name of Israel's God, Yahweh. It is a clear indication of Ruth's allegiance to Yahweh, that is, Yahweh is definitely now her God, not Chemosh.²⁷

With regards to providence, Ruth has reassured Naomi that she will provide for her needs wherever she decides to go. Even her religious obligations, she will provide for it. For Ruth has vowed to be a God fearer and God worshipper.²⁸ In other words, Ruth has guaranteed Naomi that she will perform her *tautua* to her

²⁶ Leander E. Keck, *Introduction to Narrative Literature Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1&2 Samuel, 1&2 Kings, 1&2 Chronicles, the New Interpreter's Bible Commentary* vol. 2 (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015), 641. Chemosh is regarded as the main god of Moab.

²⁷ JR Robert L. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 118.

²⁸ John R. Franke, "Ruth," in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Old Testament Iv) Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel*, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2005), 184.

until she dies. Ruth, in her reaffirmation of her *tautua* for Naomi, is simply saying to Naomi, *taofiofi* your resolve to make me return to my people, for I will make things right for us.

From the *taofiofi* perspective, Ruth's insistence to perform her *tautua* to Naomi reflects a counter claim to EN's policies. Ruth, in making an oath in the name of Israel's God, portrays the God of Israel as an inclusive one. That is, God will accept those who are willing to acknowledge Him and serve Him through the keeping of his commandments and statutes. This further illustrates the contradictions with EN's exclusive policies about the 'holy seed'. That is, EN's 'holy seed' stresses the ethnicity of the person rather than the commitment to serving God. In other words, God favours true commitment to Him regardless of one's ethnic background. Peter H. W. Lau similarly claims, "Ruth's presence opposes the idea that Israelite identity is based solely on ethnicity or descent."²⁹ A foreigner who turns to YHWH and who lives out a life of *hesed* can be valued as an important member of Israel."³⁰

²⁹ Peter H. W. Lau, "Another Postcolonial Reading of the Book of Ruth" in *Reading Ruth in Asia* Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau (eds) (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2015), 25.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.

Summary

This chapter set out to give an alternative reading and understanding of Ruth 1:6-18 from a *taofiofi* perspective. Using the five lens that have been outlined above of *fautuaga*, *taulaga*, *fa'asa'oloto*, *tete'e*, and *tautua* I concluded that Ruth 1:6-18 could be understood from *taofiofi* perspective. Moreover, the *taofiofi* perspective could also be understood as an intentional hybridity. Where there are two competing voices put together side by side with one voice trying to undermine the other. Situating the text in its historical context of the reformation period after the Babylonian exile, particularly the time of EN's missions, the *taofiofi* reading given above also illuminates the issues behind the text especially EN's marriage ban with foreign women.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this final chapter I will firstly give a summary of the whole thesis and highlight the conclusions reached. The conclusions will include the alternative reading of Ruth 1:6-18 from my *taofiofi* perspective. Secondly, I will discuss how this alternative reading will enrich the Samoan readers understanding of the bible and hopefully the readers will also embrace the value of their traditions, culture, and language in reading the bible. Moreover, it will highlight the significance of the reader's location in reading and interpreting the bible. In other words, I will highlight the relevance of this reading to the ministry of the EFKS. Finally, I will share some ideas on how this reading may contribute to the further studies of the Book of Ruth and the Old Testament in general.

4.1 Summary of findings

The main question that this work addresses is whether a Samoan concept of *taofiofi* could be used as a hermeneutic to read a particular biblical text, Ruth 1:6-18. If this is possible, then what kind of understanding this reading will give?

Also, will this alternate reading help Samoan readers (particularly EFKS members) to further their understanding of the bible?

In trying to answer the preceding questions, this work sets out to re-read Ruth 1:6-18 from a Samoan context namely the *taofiofi* perspective. As outlined in Chapter (2), my hermeneutic utilises *taofiofi*, a Samoan concept, with its elements of *fautuaga*, *taulaga*, *fa'asa'oloto*, *tete'e* and *tautua*, as lens to read the biblical text of Ruth 1:6-18. Furthermore, I also used historical criticism as a tool in the exegesis part especially the issues behind the text for understanding the biblical text. In this regard, I accepted the view that one of the issues behind the Book of Ruth was the intermarriage ban against foreign women advocated by EN. That is, the Book of Ruth is a polemic against EN's exclusive policies especially against intermarriage with foreign women.

I also utilised *taofiofi* as an intentional hybridity, a postcolonial concept, to further highlight this polemic against EN's exclusive policies against mixed-marriages.

Given the exegetical work in Chapter 3, it became apparent that the dialogue between Ruth and Naomi in Ruth 1:6-18 could be understood as *taofiofi*. The exegesis using *taofiofi* aspects of *fautuaga*, *taulaga*, *fa'asa'oloto*, *tete'e*, and

tautua as hermeneutical lens demonstrated this. Naomi's insistence for the two Moabite women to return to their people and families provided one voice, while Ruth provided the alternative voice which are constantly held in tension throughout the dialogue. In reference to the *taofiofi* hermeneutics, both women were trying to *taofiofi* each other. That is, Naomi is urging Ruth to return to her homeland and Ruth insisting for Naomi to let her accompany her to Israel. Moreover, within this dialogue, elements of *fautuaga*, *taulaga*, *fa'asa'oloto*, *tete'e*, and *tautua* were apparent suggesting that Ruth's popular confession is a *taofiofi* and a form of intentional hybridity. In other words, Ruth is basically saying to Naomi, 'you are wrong in wanting to let me return to my family and people. All the reasons that you have said about the hardships I may face and probably may because I do not accept. I will show you that I will be a source of blessings to you rather than a burden.'

In light of this alternative understanding of Ruth's confession from a *taofiofi* perspective, we could also see that Ruth has inherit some characteristics of a good leader. In other words, Ruth now has shown humility (*loto maualalo; aga malū*), respect (*ava; fa'aaloalo*), courage (*loto tele; loto toa*), integrity (*fuā amiotonu*) and cultural competence (*le agava'a i aganu'u*). The characteristics of a good leader which are all apparent in Ruth's *fautuaga*, *taulaga*, *fa'asa'oloto*, *tete'e*, and *tautua*.

Given the preceding summary, therefore, the alternative reading or interpretation of Ruth 1:6-18 has moved further than the traditional interpretation of Ruth's confession. Traditionally, Ruth 1:6-18, especially Ruth's confession is interpreted as Ruth's unwavering love or deep love through loyalty to Naomi, her mother in law. The alternative understanding given here emphasises Ruth's *taofiofi* of Naomi's request and reasons for her request. For Ruth, she could not accept this and her rejection of Naomi's request/demand symbolises her willingness to prove Naomi wrong. For Ruth, separation as demanded by Naomi, will lead to more suffering not remaining together as family. In other words, she will not be a burden and curse to Naomi but a source of blessings.

Moreover, the juxtaposition of the two voices of Naomi and Ruth highlights *taofiofi* as intentional hybridity where Ruth's voice is set side by side with Naomi's voice and at the same time undermining Naomi's voice. This postcolonial perspective also mirrors the issue of intermarriage during EN's post exilic restoration. Ruth's voice represents those who rejects EN's ban of intermarriage with foreigners. Also, it emphasises how foreigners bring blessings rather than curses and sufferings.

4.2 Relevance for EFKS ministry

The following are some of the significant contributions of this study and its conclusions to the ministry of the EFKS.

- i. The importance given to the reader's social location in reading and interpreting the bible is very relevant to the ministry of the EFKS. This is to encourage the members that their own personal context is significant in their understanding of the bible.
- ii. Relating to (i) above, the emphasis also on the readers Samoan culture and traditions, concepts, sayings, and even myths and legends, in reading the bible is also relevant to EFKS members. This will enable the EFKS members to use resources from his/her context which are more familiar and accessible to him/her in reading and interpreting the bible.
- iii. The alternative reading provided here of Ruth 1:6-18 will further enrich the EFKS members in their understanding of Ruth's confession. Not only as a commitment of love and loyalty but a kind of *taofiofi* where Ruth challenges the norms and traditions directing society as represented by Naomi's arguments. Utilising Samoan concepts such as *taofiofi* and its elements of *fautuaga*, *taulaga*, *fa'asa'oloto*, *tete'e*, and *tautua* really helps EFKS members to fully grasp this alternative reading.

- iv. The alternative interpretation also is relevant when trying to read it in light of the historical context of the Book of Ruth. That is, the *taofiofi* reading illuminates the issue behind the text of the ban of intermarriage with foreign women. Ruth's *taofiofi* of Naomi reflects the will of some of the people to reject EN's policy and prove that foreigners, or to be specific foreign women, are not the cause of suffering but partners to acquire God's blessings.

4.3 Contribution for further research

One of the assumptions of this work at the beginning is that an alternative reading of Ruth 1:6-8 from a Samoan perspective will have something to contribute to the study of the bible in general. The following are some of the ways that this study may contribute not only to the understanding of the Old Testament but the Bible as a whole.

- i. The approach in this study I believe will contribute to the drive of reading the Bible from Island perspectives which is now properly known as Island Criticism. That is, Island readers' locations and contexts, together with Island concepts are now given more significances in reading and interpreting biblical texts.

- ii. The *taofiofi* reading attempted in this work is not confined to the Book of Ruth or to the Old Testament as well. I believe this approach is also relevant to the study of all biblical texts.
- iii. The *taofiofi* reading attempted here has enriched the meaning of Ruth's confession from a traditional interpretation of loyalty and deeply affectionate love to an act of resistance.
- iv. The *taofiofi* reading or approach utilised in this work is just in its original state and is open to further improvements by those interested in such an approach.
- v. The utilising of *taofiofi* as a postcolonial concept is also an interesting development. I suggest that other Samoan concepts could be used in postcolonial studies of the Old Testament as well in the future.

GLOSSARY

<i>Aga malū</i>	humility
<i>Aiga</i>	family
<i>Ava</i>	respect
<i>Fa'a</i>	causative prefix
<i>Fa'aaloalo</i>	respect
<i>Fa'asa'oloto</i>	to have freedom
<i>Fau</i>	build
<i>Fautua</i>	advise
<i>Fautuaga</i>	advice
<i>Fuā amiotonu</i>	integrity
<i>Lapataiga</i>	warning
<i>Le agava'a i aganu'u</i>	cultural competence

<i>Loto mauualalo</i>	humility
<i>Loto tele</i>	courage
<i>Loto toa</i>	courage
<i>Matai</i>	chief
<i>Nofo tane</i>	daughter in law
<i>O le ala i le pule o le tautua</i>	the path to authority is service
<i>Ofi</i>	fit in
<i>Sa'oloto</i>	to set free
<i>Taofi</i>	to stop
<i>Taofiofi</i>	act of slowing putting a stop to something
<i>Taulaga</i>	sacred offering
<i>Taule'ale'a</i>	untitled man
<i>Tausua mālie</i>	humour
<i>Tautua</i>	service

<i>Tautua</i>	service rendered
<i>Tautua matavela</i>	service which faces the heat of the fire
<i>Tautua toto</i>	service which protect his chief
<i>Tautua tuavae</i>	service who lives closely to the chief
<i>Tete'e</i>	an act of refuse, reject or oppose
<i>Tete'e fa'aleiloga</i>	an act of refuse that is not obvious to see
<i>Tua</i>	back

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* All bible quotes are from the NRSV version