

**“*THE PAIA WOMAN’S VOICE WEAKENS*”:
A *PAIA* READING OF RUTH’S RESILIENCE**

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Bachelor of Divinity with Honours.

by

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September 2024

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ABSTRACT

This thesis, titled “*The Paia Woman’s Voice Weakens: A Paia Reading of Ruth’s Resilience*,” explores the courage and resilience of Ruth as depicted in the biblical narrative, through the lens of “*Ua leo itiiti le Paia*” (The Paia Woman’s Voice Weakens). The study researches Ruth’s unwavering commitment to her mother-in-law Naomi, highlighting her transformation into an agent of comfort. By employing the Samoan concepts of *nofotane* (a wife staying at her husband’s family) that rooted in *tofa saili* (wisdom in seeking solutions), *tautua* (service), and Ruth’s ultimate decision to embrace Naomi’s God over returning to her own identity, the thesis underscores the depth of Ruth’s character and her resilience. Ruth’s journey is marked by her steadfast loyalty and selflessness, which are pivotal in her role as Naomi’s comforter. The concept of *tofa saili* is evident in Ruth’s strategic decisions to ensure their survival and well-being, demonstrating her wisdom and resourcefulness. Her actions embody *tautua*, as she serves Naomi with unwavering dedication, prioritizing Naomi’s needs above her own. Central to this thesis is Ruth’s commitment to Naomi’s God, a decision that signifies her complete integration into Naomi’s life and faith. This act of embracing a new identity and faith over her own cultural and familial ties highlights Ruth’s extraordinary resilience and courage. It is through this lens that the thesis examines the weakening of the Paia woman’s voice, drawing parallels between Ruth’s narrative and the experiences of women in Samoan culture who navigate complex social and familial dynamics. This thesis uses a Samoan native form of intertextuality known as *talanoa* (conversation), to highlight Ruth’s resilience through reading Ruth 1:6–22 with the story of the Paia woman.

DECLARATION

I declare that this work has not been used without due acknowledgment of any material that has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in another institution. I also declare that the work has not used any material, heard or read, without proper acknowledgment of the source.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memories of my late grandparents Leuta Samuelu and Salelagiolelilomaiava Sooalo Pagamalie who taught me how to live life. I also dedicate this thesis to my fathers and mothers (God knows you all) who raised me and showed me how to push through and be resilient in life. I also dedicate this thesis to my mother Tauesi and my siblings who have always supported our stay here in Malua. Last but not least, I also dedicate this work to my wife Faafou Uesile Leuta, and our children Cerfena, Vaimalu, Abram, Dervelous, Apenisa, and Deborah.

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List of Abbreviations

AJBT	American Journal of Biblical Theology
AB	Anchor Yale Bible
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
CCCS	Congregational Christian Church Samoa
EFKS	Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa
JBQ	Jewish Bible Quarterly
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
LMS	London Missionary Society
NAC	New American Commentary
NIB	New Interpreter's Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
USP	University of the South Pacific
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

INTRODUCTION

The story of Ruth's commitment and loyalty to Naomi is well-known. Yet, the tale of Ruth's faithfulness somewhat obscures another characteristic that is perhaps less focused on, and that is Ruth's resilience in light of expectations that are placed upon women in the story. To shed light on this, for this thesis, I want to use a Samoan proverb from my village of Paia, as an alternative framework for re-reading Ruth's story in Ruth 1:6–22.

One of the key themes in the book of Ruth is conveyed through the word (*sub*) שׁוּב “turn,”¹ which often denotes “reversals” in the Hebrew Bible, such as reversals found in the stories of Joseph and Esther.² For the Book of Ruth, the repetitive occurrence of the word in the first chapter (Ruth 1:6–22), provides an ominous sign of potential reversal(s) to come.³ Yet despite the prevalent theme of turning, we also see that Ruth remains staunch in *not* turning and remaining steadfast *with* Naomi. This raises some important questions: Is there more to her steadfastness than meets the eye? Could there be a significance to Ruth's non-turning in light of the motif of reversal? Perhaps the author is pointing towards an attitude of resistance through Ruth's resilience?

Such questions form the basis of this research, and for this thesis, I seek to (re)read intertextually, in *talanoa*⁴ (conversation) with a Samoan proverb: *Ua leo itiiti le Paia* (“The voice of the Paia woman weakens”). I use the proverb as an example of a “cultural text” that is used in oral traditions such as that of my Samoan culture. The proverb originates from a tale from my

¹ Ruth 1:6–22 (NRSV), this word appears 13 times in the passage. All biblical references are from the NRSV unless otherwise stated. See Kathleen A. Robertson Farmer, “The Book of Ruth,” in *New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 899.

² See Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 54–61; 65–81.

³ Farmer, “Book of Ruth,” 899.

⁴ I will explain *talanoa* as a tool for interrogating the biblical text in chapter 3.

village of Paia, which tells of a nameless woman praised for her resilience, yet in tragic circumstances, her voice and body weaken due to her persistence in maintaining her vow of fasting.

Through this intertextual reading, this thesis seeks to extend the conversation around the motif of “turning” (שׁוּב) which is prominent in the book of Ruth. In light of this theme, Ruth’s refraining from turning when ordered by her mother-in-law Naomi to return to her family, puts Ruth in a position of agency, where she has the authority to refuse and resist. As such, her position seems to go against the turning theme, because in Ruth 1:6-22, she does not turn. Ruth’s actions have been interpreted in traditional readings as being based on compassion and genuine care for the marginalised other, the widow (despite being a widow herself!). However, Ruth’s gesture potentially has the hallmarks of staunch resilience in the midst of vulnerability.

This opens a stark point of contention for this thesis, because it may be that despite the positive concerns around the theme of “turning” as a reversal (שׁוּב) of Ruth and Naomi’s situation, there seems to be an attitude of pushback against a colonial voice. The three men in the women’s lives all die, and the decision-making of men is no longer a factor for them and as a result, they now have agency. To extend this notion, I look to the tale of the Paia woman who, through her resilience, refuses to ‘turn’ against her vow of fasting, and in tragic circumstances, loses her voice as her health deteriorates. Despite her waning condition, her resilient spirit is praised in our village of Paia through the Samoan proverb *Ua leo itiiti le Paia* (“The voice of the Paia woman weakens.”) Through an intertextual reading, I seek to highlight Ruth’s spirit of resilience in light of the Paia woman, and how Ruth’s refusal to “turn” may be suggestive of pushback against colonial attitudes that seek to limit the agency of foreign women.

In arguing this premise, this thesis will be structured into three chapters. The first Chapter will outline my Samoan hermeneutic for reading, by utilising the proverb *Ua leo itiiti le Paia* (“The Paia woman’s voice weakens”) as a framework. In addition, I will also lay out the methodological

frame in approaching the text, using intertextuality to analyse the relationship between texts. I will conduct this with a Samoan Pasifika twist, where the intertextual analysis is guided by *talanoa*.

In Chapter two, I open up the *talanoa* by beginning with the various voices in modern scholarship on the book of Ruth. By doing this, I will bring to the fore the different perspectives regarding Ruth's resistance of returning to her homeland and joining Naomi in the new context. From this discussion, I seek to draw out implications for re-reading Ruth's resilience from a Samoan perspective.

Following on from the discussion in Chapter two, I will continue the *talanoa* in Chapter three, guided by my methodological framework as set out in Chapter one, by offering an intertextual *talanoa* between Ruth 1:6–22 and the story of the Paia woman. In this *talanoa* between the biblical and oral texts, I want to consider the implications of the previous chapter through an alternative perspective, that calls attention to colonial tendencies in the text, while offering a decolonial response that reimagines Ruth's resilience in light of the Paia woman's own attitude of struggle and persistence.

CHAPTER 1: A FRAMEWORK FOR RE-READING RUTH: INTERTEXTUALITY AND A HERMENEUTICAL LENS OF ‘THE PAIA WOMAN’S VOICE WEAKENS’

1.1 At the Intersection of Intertextuality and a Samoan Proverb

To highlight the significance of Ruth’s non-turning, an analysis of the relationship between Ruth 1:6–22 and my cultural tale is crucial. Hence, I will be employing intertextuality as a methodological framework for approaching the text/s. In doing so, I draw from the works of some biblical scholars who utilise intertextuality for analysing biblical texts such as David Penchansky and Michele Bal and others, to help construct my own intertextual framework.⁵ This will be coupled with an overview of *talanoa* as used by Samoan and Pasefika authors to interrogate texts with similar intertextual motifs.⁶ From this, I build on their work to exercise an intertextual *talanoa* between Ruth and the Samoan proverb.

1.1.1 A Definition of “intertextuality”

Julia Kristeva, defines “intertextuality” in her book *La Revolution du langage poetique* as “the transposition of one or more systems of sign into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position.”⁷ Sebastien Doane and Nathan Robert have noted that

⁵ David Pechansky, “Staying the Night: Intertextuality in Genesis and Judges,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell, 77–88 (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

⁶ Brian Fiu Kolia, “Hybridized Surviving: The Diaspora Narratives of Joseph, Esther, and Daniel,” *Religions* no.4 (2022):10–11. Also see Jione Havea, “Diaspora Contexted: Talanoa, Reading, and Theologising, as Migrants,” *Black Theology* 11.2 (2013):185–200.

⁷ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semantic Approach to Literature and Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez, European Perspective (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 15.

Kristeva's focus was "not [to] search for the meaning of a text by investigating its author's intentions or the text's own structures, but by exploring the many possible dialogues of a text with other texts and contexts."⁸ Therefore, Doane and Robert focus on the social contexts of texts and can also look at the shared theme(s) of two different stories. Kristeva thus views the text as "a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralise one another."⁹

The use of intertextuality in biblical studies has a different focus, as John Barton explains,

"In biblical studies today the term is widely used to cover all cases of interrelation between texts in the Bible, and hence to include what has more traditionally been referred to as 'Scripture citing Scripture,' 'inner-biblical interpretation,' and the 'reception' of earlier biblical texts in later ones."¹⁰

In recent times, the use of intertextuality as a method of interpreting the biblical text comprised mainly of two different forms, namely "diachronic" intertextuality which is aligned with "author-oriented" and "historical" interpretations, and "synchronic" intertextuality which deals with "reader-oriented" or "literary" readings of the text.¹¹ Benjamin Sommers offers a similar distinction to Barton, as he writes:

Intertextuality is concerned with the reader or with the text as a thing independent of its author, while influence and allusion are concerned with the author as well as the text and reader. Intertextuality is synchronic in its approach, influence or allusion diachronic or even historicist.¹²

⁸ Sebastian Doane and Nathan Robert Mastnjak, "Echoes of Rachel's Weeping: Intertextuality and Trauma in Jer.31: 15," *BibInt* 27 (2019): 415.

⁹ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 38.

¹⁰ John Barton, "Déjà Lu: Intertextuality, Method or Theory?" In *Reading Job Intertextually*, edited by Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 2. Also see: Peter D. Miscall, "Isaiah: New Heavens, New Earth, New Book," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Deanna Nolan Fewell (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 44.

¹¹ Barton, "Déjà Lu," 2.

¹² Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Read Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40-60* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8.

Elkad-Lehman and Greensfeld define the concept “intertextuality” by considering the etymology of the word first, then survey some central implications of the concept, concentrating on its extensive cultural connotations in general terms alone.

The word text originates in the Indo – Iranian word *tec*, meaning handicraft, especially weaving. In Latin the word *textus* means a woven fabric or its consistency, its texture. The verb *texere* means to weave, to combine into a composition, hence the word *textile* Latin for cloth or tissue. “Intertext” is also Latin, meaning to intertwine threads and form a piece of cloth.¹³

In this light, intertextuality can be seen as the weaving together of various happenings in two or more stories, to analyse and comment on commonalities and certain differences among their contexts and themes. The intertextual process therefore allows for certain aspects within the text to be highlighted, liberated and elevated as allusions which were not obvious at first glance in a text, may be brought out when read and juxtaposed with another text. What could this mean for reading the Bible in an intertextual manner?

Brian Kolia states that “Biblical scholars who use intertextuality to interpret texts are likely to differ on matters of theory, [so] it may be apt then ... to distinguish between scholarly goals, whether it is synchronous or diachronic, author-centred or reader-centred, soft or hard intertextuality.”¹⁴ Kolia argues further that “Although we may still be unsure as to an author’s intention, even if there is no real doubt about the chronology of the texts, the value of intertextuality as an approach lies especially in the comparisons between a variety of genres and traditions.”¹⁵ This is the focus of intertextuality in biblical studies, which is somewhat different to Kristeva’s

¹³ Ilana Elkad-Lehman and Hava Greensfeld, “Intertextuality as an interpretative method in qualitative research,” *Narrative Inquiry* 21:2 (2011), 258–275.

¹⁴ Brian Fanolua Kolia, “Maota Tau Ave: Towards an Australian-Samoan Diasporic Understanding of Wisdom in Ecclesiastes.” PhD Thesis, University of Divinity, Australia, 2021, 30.

¹⁵ Kolia, “Maota Tau Ave,” 30.

original focus. As Kolia contends, “While Kristeva may not have aimed for intertextuality to be used as a reading method, it has been a helpful enterprise for biblical interpretation. The intertextual enterprise also offers a way for moving beyond the constraints of dominant positions of reading that tend to limit the text’s application and restrict its meaning.”¹⁶ Mieke Bal maintains that a considerable part of such dominant positions in reading emerges from “white middle-class, middle-aged men,” who in their reading positions, regularly exclude “what is perceived as other” such as “women-or blacks, or gays, or the young, or the poor.”¹⁷ Reading from a feminist standpoint, Bal deems that a consideration of these dominant reading positions, and their influence on the readings which the group produces, is essential if we wish to understand better what happens in meaning-production.¹⁸ To show this, Bal conducts an intertextual reading of the story of Jephthah’s daughter in the book of Judges – whom she names “Bat.”¹⁹ From her re-reading of Bat, Bal perceives Bat’s virgin state from a female notion of virginity, where the emphasis is not on Bat’s sexual activity, but on her transition “from one life-phase to the next.”²⁰ Bal’s intertextual analysis here not only highlights the relationship between the texts, but gives rise to texts as “occasion for meaning: signifier, rather than signified.”²¹

Finally, in terms of texts, what do we mean by texts? In particular, I speak as a Samoan whose culture is largely an oral culture, and where our stories are transmitted from one generation to the other by mouth. David Penchansky argues that focusing on just literary texts may be limiting the

¹⁶ Kolia, “Maota Tau Ave,” 30.

¹⁷ Mieke Bal, “Introduction,” in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women’s Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mieke Bal. Bible and Literature Series 22 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 15.

¹⁸ Bal, “Introduction,” 15.

¹⁹ Short for “Bath-Jephthah” (daughter of Jephthah) in order to repel her nameless state in the book.

²⁰ Bal, “Between Altar,” 217.

²¹ Bal, “Introduction,” 14.

application of intertextuality. To increase the intertextual possibilities, it may be more productive to expand on the definition of texts to include “texts of culture,” including oral culture, and the interactions between written and unwritten culture.²² Juxtaposing written texts and texts of culture not only expands the range of intertextuality as a reading method but gives space for more analysis of “how the subtle and not-so-subtle variations indicate the tension of ideological struggle that occurs at the junctures of the juxtaposition of those texts.”²³ For this thesis, I will re-read Ruth intertextually with one of our native stories as a “cultural text.”

1.2.2 Talanoa as Intertextuality

Using *talanoa* as a way of (re)interpreting texts (literary, oral, cultural, etc.) is not a new sensation, nor is *talanoa* restricted to a single definition.²⁴ Jione Havea understands *talanoa* as “[t]he confluence of three things: story, telling and conversation. Talanoa is not story without telling and conversation, telling without story and conversation, or conversation without telling and story. Talanoa is all three—story, telling, conversation—as one.”²⁵ This demonstrates the fluid nature of *talanoa* but at the same time, stresses the necessity for conversation to continue on from *talanoa*.

Kolia perceives *talanoa* as a construct of the words *tala* and *noa*. Kolia’s understanding emerges out of “[t]he observatory nature of Samoan culture and wisdom [which] contributes to the

²² David Penchansky, “Staying the Night: Intertextuality in Genesis and Judges,” in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 78.

²³ Penchansky, “Staying the Night,” 79.

²⁴ For an extensive discussion on the different meanings and uses of *talanoa* in theorising and analysing texts, see Matt Tomlinson, “Talanoa as Dialogue and PTC’s Role in Creating Conversation,” *Pacific Journal of Theology*, Series II, 59 (2020): 35-46.

²⁵ Jione Havea, “Bare Feet Welcome: Redeemer Xs Moses @ Enaim.” In *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings from Oceania*. Semeia Studies 75. Edited by Jione Havea, David J. Neville and Elaine M. Wainwright, (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 210.

formation of many of its words.”²⁶ As such, in comprehending *talanoa* from a Samoan perspective, Kolia argues that

Many of Samoa’s wisdom stems from the oceanfront and here I argue that the word *talanoa* results from observations of its sea-life, in particular, fishing. *Talanoa* thus can be taken to mean an untying of knots, as envisioned in the untying of knots in an *upega* (fishing net). Before a *tautai* (fisher) goes out to use the *upega*, they must first untie the knots so that it can be used for fishing.²⁷

In light of this metaphor, Kolia seeks “to *tala* (untie) the *noa* (knots) of the text, where the *noa* refers to the ambiguous and problematic elements of the text in reading.”²⁸ When considering the intertextual enterprise, reading intertextually can be seen as *talanoa* between texts, where the purpose and goal of the *talanoa* is to untie the knots in the text in order to create new and alternative meanings. For this *talanoa*, I seek to contribute to the discussion by locating my position of reading, and the perspective of my own *talanoa*.

1.2 Developing a Samoan Hermeneutic of “The Paia Woman Weakens”

For this intertextual exercise, I want to develop a hermeneutic for reading Ruth intertextually. Because the story of the Paia Woman is a native Samoan story, the intertextuality will also take on a Samoan quality of *talanoa*. While intertextuality has been used extensively in biblical studies, *talanoa* as a Samoan/Pasifika intertextual framework is gathering momentum in recent scholarship through the works of Jione Havea, Nāsili Vaka’uta, and Brian Fiu Kolia.

²⁶ Brian Fiu Kolia, “Arriving Like a Fish of the Night” (“*Tō’ai Faa-I’a a le Po*”): An Australian-Samoan Diasporic Reading of *Pāsah* in Exod 12:12-13 through a Samoan Fishing Proverb.” In *Reading the Bible in Australia*, edited by Barbara Deutschmann, Michelle Eastwood and Deborah Storie (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2024), 103.

²⁷ Kolia, “Arriving Like a Fish,” 103.

²⁸ Kolia, “Arriving Like a Fish,” 103.

1.2.2 The village of Paia and its Life

My village of Paia is a small village when compared to other Samoan villages and as a result, it is not a village that is well-known by a lot of Samoans. Consequently, many people make fun of the village due to its relative anonymity. The village is located inland of the forest, and the people who live in the coastal areas often call the people of Paia: *ai vao* (“grass eaters”). The people of Paia are used to other villagers calling them *ai vao*, yet despite their mocking, the villagers have subverted the meaning of *ai vao* to have positive connotations. In seeing this, the men utilise the *vao* by making plantations, farming, hunting for pigeons, and tending pigs and cows. The women utilise the *vao* through cooking, weaving fine mats, and producing *siapo* (“Samoan cloth”).

According to most villagers, the time of the Paia woman was a time when most people in Paia lived an impoverished lifestyle and the jobs they worked reflected this. The people were mainly planters, fishers, and weavers. There were no office workers, and only a few taught at the Primary school. Our parents used the Barter System through the exchange of goods and services through goodwill. They didn't have much money, but they committed to church offerings and serving the church, especially prioritising the care of the *faiifeau* (“church minister”), as our elders believed, it would benefit the youth and the future of our community. In recent times, the demographics of Paia have changed, with a few Paia people in government and large companies, others owning and running businesses, and some who have chosen to serve God through working in parishes and different churches.

1.2.3 The Story of the Paia Woman

In my village of Paia, the proverb in question says: *Ua leo itiiti le Paia* (“The Paia woman's voice weakens”). The proverb emerges from the story of a nameless woman from the village of

Paia in Savaii, who had a friendship/relationship with another nameless woman from the neighbouring village of *Fatuvalu*. Their usual work performed twice a week was the production of *siapo* (“Samoan cloth”) and the weaving of *ie toga* (“fine mats”). For these types of work/production, it is a must for them to provide lunch (“*i’i* in Samoan”), for the hours of work were long. They planned and agreed one day to produce and weave fine mats. However, in trying to push their work and not waste time, they decided against having lunch but instead have an *anapogi* (“fast”) where they were to abstain from eating, drinking or smoking *tipi* (“Samoan tobacco”). The two women went to get ready for their work, with the agreement to fast. The impetus behind their sacrifice was that their children and families would prosper, because at the time, there were scarce resources for food. Having an *anapogi* therefore would save food for their families.

However, the story goes that the woman of *Fatuvalu* broke her *anapogi* by way of the road she took from her home to Paia. From *Fatuvalu* to Paia, there is a bypass road (shortcut) called Saō (meaning “silence”). This road consisted of rows of big trees which provided cover from the sun and the heat. The road also had a lot of vegetation growing along it and there is a lot of food because it is rich in fruits. There were also families who lived beside this road, and due to the Samoan culture of hospitality, it is considered normal practise for families to invite passersby inside their homes for food. As the story goes, the woman from *Fatuvalu* broke the agreement with the *Paia* woman, as she ate while walking along this shortcut to *Paia*.

When the woman from *Fatuvalu* had reached *Paia*, she and the *Paia* woman started weaving, talking and sharing lots of fun stories. However, due to the *Fatuvalu* woman having already eaten, she came to the weaving with a full stomach, thus having strength to produce her mats compared to the *Paia* woman who kept her vow of fasting. The *Paia* woman had no knowledge of the *Fatuvalu* woman’s broken vow. Nearing the end of the fast, the *Fatuvalu* woman, as well as the *Paia* woman’s family, noticed that the *Paia* woman’s voice weakened and could not utter a sound.

From this tale comes the origins of the proverb, *Ua leo itiiti le Paia* a phrase of jest, which transpires from the neighbouring villages mocking the people of *Paia*. The reason for the mockery is because these villagers believe that the *Paia* woman's voice was weakened due to her foolishness. Rather than eating and drinking, she chose to remain faithful to keep the vow she made with the woman from *Fatuvalu*.

In an alternative application of the proverb, the proverb communicates the sense of one not having enough. As a result, the proverb is used to excuse a person from not having a gift to reward in reply to a person's kind gesture or good work done, yet still signify that person's gratitude. For instance, a person might say, "We are so sorry, the *Paia* woman's voice is weak, for this is all we have to show our appreciation of what you have done for us, our family, and village."

This self-deprecating attitude reflects the common way in how many people express this proverb, yet from this common application, it seems that the story behind the proverb is obscure to those using it under such a premise. At the same time, the users of the proverb are likely unaware of the element of shame that the story has for the people of *Paia*. As a native of *Paia*, I want to retell this story from the ignominy of *Paia* people who, when hearing this story, are reminded of the trauma and resilience of its native women. It is from this standpoint that I want to contribute to the scholarly conversation regarding the story of Ruth and her own story of resistance and resilience.

1.2.4 The *Paia* Woman's resilience

The poverty of the people of *Paia* prompts them to hard work and determination, which also generates strong attitudes of resilience. This is seen in their aptitude for conducting building projects and works in the fields and plantations. It comes as no surprise then that the *Paia* woman, who arises out of this context, reveals a resilient character in her act of fasting. Fasting or *anapogi* is an impoverishment of the body. According to Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi, "[a]*n*apogi literally

refers to the rituals of the evening. It is a ritual of self denial, prayer and meditation, i.e., the denial of food, company, sex and other distraction.”²⁹ In the *anapogi* ritual, the person in their act of fasting sought to “contemplate the harmonies and gain spiritual insight.”³⁰ For the people of Paia, these harmonies constituted well-being and prosperity for one’s family and village.

This is why the nameless woman from Paia conducts fasting, because of the desire to raise the profile of her family and for her family’s prosperity, because when the family prospers, the village prospers. This is the reason why the woman from Paia did not give up, because she believed that her resilience would initiate good fortune for her family. Yet tragically, despite her persistence with her *anapogi* it ended up weakening her voice and caused her health to deteriorate. As a Paia native myself, I find my own story to resonate with that of the unnamed Paia woman. I share the same heritage as her, and as a member of this humble village, this story of vulnerability is also my story. Her persistence and determination is a tale of inspiration for the people of *Paia*, and this represents my perspective in reading. Indeed, I am not creating a new perspective, but adapting the standpoint of the Paia woman as a hermeneutical lens to (re)read Ruth tale of resilience. The story of the Paia woman’s resilience is a subversion of the usual narrative associated with our village, a narrative that seeks to diminish our significance as people and as a village. Behind her resilience lies her hope, for the wellbeing and good health of her children and her family.

In light of the *Paia* woman’s resilience I want to probe further into Ruth’s determination to remain loyal to her mother-in-law Naomi. Ruth’s commitment to stay and not return to her family is surprising because the usual convention suggests that she should return to her family, but instead

²⁹ Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi, “In Search of Harmony: Peace in the Samoan Indigenous Religion,” in *Suesue Manogi: In search of fragrance Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi Efi and the Samoan Indigenous Reference*, edited by Tamasailau M Suaalii-Sauni, et.al., Wellington: Huia, 2018.

³⁰ Efi, “In Search of Harmony.” 158–172.

she has given her whole life to take care of Naomi. This unusual practice warrants a reading that seeks to address why Ruth had not turned to go to her family, but instead remains with Naomi. Strikingly, she knows nothing about the customs and traditions of Judah but still chooses to leave her native home of Moab. Could this be an indication of native resilience? Is this a form of resistance against patriarchal systems that generate male-centred marriage conventions? In terms of the theme of “turning”, could Ruth’s ‘non-turning’ be a signal of decoloniality in the text? In response to these questions, I will offer a re-reading of Ruth’s resilience intertextually with the resilience of the Paia woman, which might generate newer and alternative ways of reading the story of Ruth, and the resilience of women in the greater context of the Hebrew Bible.

CHAPTER 2: RESILIENCE OF RUTH: A SCHOLARLY TALANOA

For this chapter, I want to give an overview of the different scholarly views regarding the story of Ruth, through a *talanoa*. The aim of this *talanoa* is to highlight Ruth's resilience in the narrative in light of the scholarly conversation. It is not so much a search for consensus, but rather, a *talanoa* that puts these scholars in dialogue with each other. In this chapter, I will situate the scholarly *talanoa* among three thematic concerns that seek to highlight Ruth's resilience in the face of the difficulties she encounters. Firstly, the *talanoa* will begin with the theme of "loving kindness," where Ruth's resilience is shown through חסד (*chesed/hesed*) "loving kindness." Secondly, the *talanoa* will drift to the theme of "loyalty," by looking at scholarly views of Ruth's kindness as imagined through her loyalty. Finally, the *talanoa* will move to the theme of "courage," where Ruth acts bravely in the face of uncertainty by showing courage in her every action.

2.1 חסד (*chesed/hesed*)

The *talanoa* begins with the theme of חסד as posited by some scholars. Alicia Besa Panganiban suggests that Ruth's resilience amidst vulnerability is rooted in חסד (*hesed*).³¹ According to Panganiban, "*Hesed* [is] loving kindness, a generosity beyond the call of duty, willingly and freely given without conditions, nor any ill motive."³² In other words, *hesed* is the act of showing loving kindness through actions as opposed to words alone.³³ Ruth's first act of

³¹ Alicia Besa Panganiban, "Theology of Resilience amidst Vulnerability in the Book of Ruth" *Feminist Theology* 20 no.2 (2020):182–197. See Jeremy Schipper, *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 32.

³² Panganiban, "Theology of Resilience," 188.

³³ Alice L. Laffey and Mahri Leonard-Fleckman, *Ruth*, Wisdom Commentary, edited by Amy-Jill Levine and Barbara E. Reid (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017), 29.

resilience is demonstrated through her coming to terms with the deaths of her father-in-law Elimelech and her husband Mahlon. As Panganiban argues, “Ruth built resilience by accepting hardship and death as life’s reality,” and further to this, Ruth’s resilience is maintained by “keeping a positive view of herself, and having a focused sense of identity and commitment to care for someone.”³⁴ Being positive therefore, enables one to be committed to resilience.³⁵ As such, Ruth’s positivity allows her to move beyond the trauma and to be more firm in her decisions.

The change in Ruth’s attitude leads to Ruth's disobedience of Naomi’s command to return to her homeland. And here, we notice an interesting dynamic by Naomi’s two daughter-in-laws. When Naomi orders Ruth and Orpah to head back to their families, “Convinced and empowered, Orpah, perhaps the logical one, obeys and heads home (1:14), but Ruth refuses to abandon Naomi - an indication that she is unconvinced by Naomi’s rhetoric on finding security in getting married.”³⁶ Naomi commands Ruth for the third time (1:15), and Ruth, out of her commitment to Naomi, continues to show love to her mother-in-law, which by contrast to Orpah, reveals an “illogical” resilience amidst vulnerability. Further, Panganiban finds that

Ruth probably became more resolved to stay with Naomi upon seeing her sister-in-law depart. Who is to care for Naomi? How will she survive on her own at her age? Even if the Israelites are known to be generous to widows, one still must do the work of picking and gathering. She’s determined to stay with Naomi, knowing in leaving her she would probably be sending Naomi to her deathbed earlier than need be the case.³⁷

A resilience borne out of רחם “loving kindness” which not only sees Ruth reject going back to her homeland, but in response to Orpah’s departure, she follows a new purpose altogether. A purpose

³⁴ Panganiban, “Theology of Resilience,” 196.

³⁵ Cf. James McKeown, *Ruth*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2015), 31.

³⁶ Panganiban, “Theology of Resilience,” 187.

³⁷ Panganiban, “Theology of Resilience,” 188.

that sees her go with Naomi, to live with her and to take care of her, but also worship Naomi's God, and to be buried on her land.³⁸

Hassan Musa talks about Ruth's resilience rooted in loving kindness when he discusses the complexities of migration and what it means for the book of Ruth, in dialogue with a "theology of home."³⁹ For Musa, a "theology of home" draws on some of the negative implications of migration that result in homelessness for many migrants. During migration, many people have died on the road and at sea, and others have been sold into slavery, with some being slaves in their own lands and among their own people. Many people felt that their original home was unsafe and their lives were at risk due to stringent policies, wars and sociopolitical and socioreligious instabilities. Thus, as Musa posits, a "theology of home" emerges from a reading of Ruth which highlights an alternative vision for a new and improved community that cares for the needs of others and promotes well-being. As Musa argues, "Ruth resisted the ravaging effect of hunger and the dehumanizing effects of foreignness, she dared to survive, she moved out of her comfort zone by faith and action in search of a new and better way to live."⁴⁰ Indeed, the resilient spirit of Ruth reflects this new vision as shown by the intimate relationship between Ruth and Naomi.⁴¹

However, Musa also notes that Ruth's resilience placed her in a vulnerable space which she did not avoid. When in Bethlehem, Ruth listened to Naomi, and out of respect and love, she went to glean at an unknown field that was potentially dangerous, coupled with the risk of human rejection, sexual harassment, rape, and racism (to foreigners).⁴² Yet, Ruth does not fall victim to

³⁸ Panganiban, "Theology of Resilience," 187.

³⁹ Hassan Musa, "The Book of Ruth and the Theology of Home: A Quest for New Communities of Care and Human Dignity in Africa," *AJBT* 5 no.4 (2022): 94–113.

⁴⁰ Musa, "Book of Ruth," 107.

⁴¹ Musa, "Book of Ruth," 102.

⁴² Musa, "Book of Ruth," 110.

these risks, instead, as Musa argues, “we see in chapter 2 [of the book of Ruth] a world without hatred or violence, or marginalization, or any form of discrimination, but rather it is a homely world, where greetings happen, freedom is given and accepted.”⁴³ Based on Musa’s observation, it seems that the author of the book of Ruth may have depicted Ruth’s resilience—through her loving kindness—as an avenue for worlds to turn: from potentially dangerous to one of a homely community.

In another sense, loving kindness as an explanation of Ruth’s resilience, as Justin Jackson contends, could be understood within the contours of covenant.⁴⁴ In the Hebrew Bible, relationships between people are often confirmed by the establishment of covenants, for instance, the covenant between God and Israel as delineated in the Pentateuch. Covenant is as much a confirmation of relationality as it is a platform for maintaining *חסד* and encouraging care and kindness between/among covenantal partners. For Jackson, “the story of Ruth and Boaz serves as an idyll of how God’s people are to live in covenantal harmony with one another. Ruth’s kindness to Naomi and Boaz, as well as Boaz’s kindness to Ruth and Naomi, pictures what God intended for his people’s daily, covenantal interaction.”⁴⁵ The cycle of *חסד* in these relationships constitutes a society guided by covenant. In this sense, not only does covenant encourage a society built on care and kindness, it also pushes for individuals to remain resilient in the face of adversity and uncertainty, by being kind and homely particularly to those who are poor and vulnerable.

⁴³ Musa, “Book of Ruth,” 110.

⁴⁴ Justin Jackson, “The One Who Returned: A Retrospective and Prospective Reading of Ruth,” *JETS* 63 no.3 (2020): 435–54.

⁴⁵ Jackson, “The One Who Returned,” 450.

2.2 Loyalty

The *talanoa* moves to the theme of loyalty, where in the book of Ruth, the lines of family connections are blurred. According to Diane Jacobson, in the book of Ruth, “the biblical understanding of family, [centers] not on clan and blood relationships but on acts of loyalty and love.”⁴⁶ Thus, Ruth’s familial link to Naomi is determined by her loyalty to Naomi and her commitment to what she pledged to do for Naomi (1:16–17). The loyalty of Ruth is extraordinary given the circumstances. The patriarch (Elimelech) dies, and the two sons after ten years also die. The family is therefore left with no man to provide for the family and continue the family lineage. But there is tension, as Jacobson argues:

According to that custom, living sons marry the widows of dead brothers so that they might beget children to continue the family lineage. The tension is clear. In terms of affection Naomi considers these women her daughters, but in terms of the law she sees no option but rejection and the lonely return as a broken woman. For their own good they cannot be her daughters. Ruth rejects this conclusion with her own speech that redefines family entirely (1:16–17). In her oath of loyalty and commitment, Ruth in effect says, “No, for better or for worse, I—Moabite though I be—declare myself to be part of your family. I will not leave you. We are bound together, and I shall willingly become an immigrant into my own enemy nation for the sake of affection.”⁴⁷

The tension is dissipated by Ruth’s resilience and rejection of the status quo according to the law. In Ruth’s view, Naomi is now her family. The family connection lines also transcend ethnic boundaries, whereby Ruth’s native Moab is depicted throughout the Hebrew Bible as a national enemy of Israel.⁴⁸ Ruth went with Naomi to Bethlehem, an act of devotion and loyalty to what she needs to commit to, according to her vow.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Diane Jacobson, “Redefining Family in the Book of Ruth.” *Word & World* 33 no.1 (2023): 5–11.

⁴⁷ Jacobson, “Redefining Family,” 7.

⁴⁸ Jacobson. “Redefining Family,” 6.

⁴⁹ Jacobson, “Redefining Family,” 7.

To see Ruth's resilience that was caused by her loyalty and commitment, Dave Bland invites us to see the bigger picture of God's purpose in the book of Ruth. Bland makes an interesting observation, whereby "God is both one who sends evil and also the one who delivers from them. God sent famine and death to the family of Naomi. He made her empty (*rëqâm*; 1:21). But he also sent Ruth. And it was through her love and dedication that Naomi was fulfilled (4:14-16)."⁵⁰ The role that Ruth plays therefore acts as a counter not only to Naomi's condition, but the national calamity of famine faced by Moab. Ruth's resilience therefore could be viewed in light of the family disaster, but also in view of the national catastrophe.

Extending the *talanoa* further, the lines of familial links are not only blurred in the story, but also in a different sense in terms of the book of Ruth and its placement in the different biblical texts. The significance lies in how Ruth is read when juxtaposed alongside different texts, having a different *talanoa* in different places. Jackson discovers that the book of Ruth is somewhat of a "wandering nomad," meaning that the book placement is different and unique in a number of the biblical manuscripts.⁵¹ This provides a different avenue to (re)consider Ruth's resilience, and Jackson invites us to look at some of those placings.

In the Masoretic Text, Ruth comes after the book of Proverbs, which connects the character of Ruth with the "worthy woman" in Proverbs 31. Jackson elaborates on this connection, contending that "This worthy woman stands as a model of a covenant-keeping wife, whose service and sacrifice teach *hesed* to those who are near her (Prov 31:26). In the Masoretic canonical placement,

⁵⁰ Dave Bland, "God's Activity as Reflected in the Books of Ruth and Esther," *Restoration Quarterly* 24 no.3 (1981): 135.

⁵¹ Jackson, "The One Who Returned," 438-439.

Ruth serves as a visible representation of a ‘worthy woman,’ especially as she diligently serves her mother-in-law.”⁵²

In the Septuagint, Ruth comes after the book of Judges and before the book of Samuel, which highlights an interesting contrast among the books. Where in the book of Judges, Israel seeks refuge in other gods and rejects their God, Ruth, a Moabite, leaves her gods and seeks refuge in the God of Israel.⁵³ Kathleen Robertson Farmer makes a similar point about Ruth’s placement relative to Judges as she argues, “The book of Judges illustrates the ways in which lack of loyalty and kindness among the children of Israel leads to division and death. In contrast, Ruth demonstrates what can happen when even a foreigner whose origins are despised in Israel chooses loyalty and kindness as a way of life.”⁵⁴ This contrast highlights the loyalty of Ruth

The Bava Batra—the third of the three Talmudic tractates—places Ruth before Psalms. It indicates the connection of Ruth’s and Boaz’s actions to true wisdom. Jackson explains that “Here two people seek to live in a way that is faithful to the covenant and thereby pleasing to YHWH. Wisdom is forsaking one’s gods and seeking refuge in YHWH. Likewise, wisdom is obeying God’s commands by showing *hesed* to the foreigners and widows.”⁵⁵

The final placement is in the Megilloth, within the Ketuvim or the Writings section of the Hebrew Bible. The Megilloth consists of five scrolls, namely, Song of Songs, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations and Esther, which coincide with different festivals on the Jewish calendar.⁵⁶ And

⁵² Jackson, “The One Who Returned,” 438.

⁵³ Jackson, “The One Who Returned,” 438.

⁵⁴ Farmer, “Book of Ruth,” 899–900.

⁵⁵ Jackson, “The One Who Returned,” 438–439.

⁵⁶ Song of Songs is read during Passover, Ruth during the Feast of Weeks (Shavuot), Ecclesiastes during the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot), Lamentations during the Ninth of Av (Tish B’Av), and Esther during Purim.

they are often read together and intended to commemorate God's redemptive work for Israel. In this sense, Ruth “is specifically written to link past and future.”⁵⁷

In these different orderings and their readings, Ruth's resilience is highlighted when read *with* different texts, an intertextual *talanoa*! Through this *talanoa* of texts, Ruth's resilience is a byproduct of her loyalty and commitment to serve her mother-in-law. Ruth's resilience also coincides with her seeking refuge with Naomi's God. Her resilience is also highlighted by wisdom texts portraying her as a “worthy woman.” Finally, Ruth's resilience is a reflection of God's redemptive work, where she is a covenant connector of God's past and future promises.

2.3 Ruth's courage

Our *talanoa* turns to the theme of courage. Julie Chu discussed that the book of Ruth gives us a different look at the roles of women and the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.⁵⁸ Women are the main characters of this book, and one of the major attributes displayed by women in the book is courage. For Ruth, “it was a long way home since people there were not friendly to Moabites. Ruth was not so intimidated by the unfriendliness at all. She tried her best to identify herself as a Jew by practicing her promise to Naomi (1:16–17) and by gleaning in the field according to the custom. Ruth's determination probably encouraged Naomi and made her initiate the daring plan for their future (3:1).”⁵⁹ Ruth's agency and courage becomes a source of empowerment for Naomi during bitterness and hardships. Despite their miserable state as widows, “they passed the constrictions of their gender and struggled actively for survival and salvation

⁵⁷ Jackson, “The One Who Returned,” 439.

⁵⁸ Julie L. C. Chu, *Returning Home: The Inspiration of the Role Dedifferentiation in the Book of Ruth for Taiwanese Women*, Semei Chu: Returning Home, 47–53.

⁵⁹ Chu, “Returning Home,” 51.

instead of waiting for the males to rescue them.”⁶⁰ Ruth’s courageous choice to cling to Naomi and neglect her home, is likened to Abraham but with exceptional faith, as Chu writes, “Her faith was much stronger than that of Abraham, the father of faith, who started to a new destination because of God’s promise (Gen 12:1-4). Without a promise from the Divine, neither with approval of her mother-in-law, Ruth was still determined to identify with Naomi by accepting Naomi’s place, people, and God (1:16-17).”⁶¹ Such courage to act inspired a resilience for Ruth to become the “bread-winner” for the family, as she supported her new family through gleaning.⁶²

Peter Lau in his postcolonial reading of the book of Ruth also contends that Ruth’s resilience was built on courage, a trait highlighted by her willingness to take risks.⁶³ Ruth, a foreigner who is accepted into the community of the Israelites, both reinforces and resists the understanding of her new identity.⁶⁴ Ruth’s first act of courage that shows her resilience, is her transformation from being a Moabite to an Israelite. In her transformation, she enters into a vow of devotion to be a companion to Naomi, which leads to her becoming an Israelite, and to serve Naomi’s God (1:16–17).⁶⁵ Secondly, Ruth abandons her identity (2:11) by sacrificing the security of her mother’s home (1:8), thus risking her very livelihood to instead commit to the uncertainty of life with Naomi. Thirdly, Ruth also took a risk by choosing Boaz to be her marriage partner, which was based more on her trust of Naomi’s instruction (3:1–4), than for her personal gain. Lastly, the big risk that Ruth took was Naomi’s threshing floor scheme, as Lau writes, “As a single

⁶⁰ Chu, “Returning Home,” 48.

⁶¹ Chu, “Returning Home,” 48–49.

⁶² Chu, “Returning Home,” 49.

⁶³ Peter H. W. Lau, “Another Postcolonial Reading of the Book of Ruth,” in *Reading Ruth in Asia*, eds. Jione Havea and Peter H. W. Lau (SBL Press, 2015), 15–34.

⁶⁴ Lau, “Another Postcolonial,” 22.

⁶⁵ Lau, “Another Postcolonial,” 23.

woman sent in the dark of night beyond the protection of the city wall, she was at risk of physical assault (Song 5:7). Since threshing floors were associated with prostitution, she was at risk of sexual assault (Hos 9:1). And her reputation was at risk if Boaz misinterpreted her presence at the threshing floor as an attempt at seduction or entrapment, instead of signalling her availability and intention for marriage.”⁶⁶ This indeed was a sign of Ruth’s courage, but also a resilience that sought to obey Naomi’s will despite the dangers of her command.

Similarly, Beth Elness-Hanson identifies Ruth resilience through courage, through the bold decisions she made that shaped the rest of her and Naomi’s lives. For Elness-Hanson, the book of Ruth highlights the agency of women, but also the courage of Ruth as a survivor.⁶⁷ As a result, we see Ruth's resilience by her staunch choice not to be a victim of her circumstances and thus “waiting for a man to change her fate.”⁶⁸ Instead, Ruth’s courage results in men honouring her, as she is honored by Boaz (3:11) with the status of “worthy woman” or “valiant woman,” a mark of her honesty, independence, and a strong-willed, determined, resourceful, innovative, and redeeming woman.⁶⁹

To sum up this *talanoa*, Ruth's resilience was one built on loving kindness, loyalty and courage. This is highlighted by her love and loyalty to Naomi which led to her neglecting her identification with the Moabites, but finding courage to take a complete turn (שוב) into a new identity with Naomi's family, village, country, and God. This was not just a resilience in the face of death in her family, but a resilience that defied the law and societal expectations. It was a

⁶⁶ Lau, “Another Postcolonial,” 23.

⁶⁷ Beth Elness-Hanson, “If You Bless the Women...”: An Intercultural Analysis of Blessings in the Book of Ruth, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 170 (2021), 109–126.

⁶⁸ Elness-Hanson, “If You Bless the Women,” 120.

⁶⁹ Elness-Hanson, “If You Bless the Women,” 120.

resilience that also resisted death in the face of the national food crisis in Moab. From this *talanoa*, I want to draw implications and extend the *talanoa* of Ruth's resilience, from a Samoan perspective in *talanoa* with the Paia woman whose voice was weakened due to her own resilience.

CHAPTER 3: READING RUTH'S RESILIENCE INTERTEXTUALLY

Using the methodological framework in chapter one, I want to contribute to the *talanoa* (conversation) in chapter two by re-reading Ruth 1:6–22 intertextually with the *Paia* woman. Drawing on the *Paia* story, I highlight the agency of women in the Samoan context and the important roles they play. Specifically, I will talk of the roles of women as *nofotane* (married woman who stays with her husband's family) and *tautua* (servant) to re-envisage Ruth's resilience in the narrative.

3.1 Ruth as a *nofotane*

I want to begin this *talanoa* by discussing Ruth as a *nofotane*. Ruth is not a *nofotane* in the strict sense, for in the beginning of the story, she still resides in her native Moab, but she does exhibit qualities and characteristics of a *nofotane*. She also lives with her husband's family which enables her to be classified as a *nofotane*. To clarify, I will explain *nofotane* as a familial concept in the Samoan context. The discussion of the concept will seek to highlight not only what a *nofotane* is, but also call attention to some of the attitudes that are shown towards *nofotane* in the Samoan context. Could Ruth be identified as a *nofotane*? Could we reimagine Ruth's resilience through such an identification?

3.1.1 *Nofotane* as concept

As is the case with many Samoan stories, there are often elements of a story/stories that are disputed by village members of the village/s where the story/stories originate. As a result, Samoans will often offer a disclaimer through the saying, *E mau eseese Samoa* which translates as "Samoans have diverse accounts," implying that Samoans, whether as individuals in a village, or the village

collective, may have their own version of how a story is told. The story of the *Paia* woman has a point of contention among the *Paia* villagers. For instance, the *Paia* woman's status in the village is debated by the people of modern-day *Paia*, where some villagers argue that she is a native, while others contend that she is a *nofotane*. To highlight her resilience in the story, I want to take the interpretation of the *Paia* woman as a *nofotane*. The term *nofotane* is a Samoan concept for the married woman who resides with her husband's family. To understand this further, *nofotane* is made up of two words: *nofo* and *tane*. The word *nofo* can mean "sit", "reside", or "to stay." The second word *tane* refers to man or husband. The word *nofotane* therefore refers to the Samoan tradition of the married woman (wife) who leaves her family, community, and people and goes to reside with her husband's family.⁷⁰

The term *nofotane* also carries some negative connotations, as Latu Latai explains that *nofotane* "can be a derogatory [term] given to a female married into the family if she should err in the carrying out of her duties."⁷¹ In other words, the term *nofotane* is used by some as a rebuke. In the Samoan context, this negative connotation of *nofotane* is prevalent, and before I progress in this reading, I want to destigmatise the term *nofotane* by highlighting two particular characteristics they may exhibit. These characteristics are those of being *fiaola* (opportunity seeker) and having *tofa saili* (searching wisdom).

3.1.1.1 Nofotane as Fiaola

For a *nofotane*, she commits her whole life to loving the husband's family, and embracing his people, identity, and cultural traditions, at the same time, she accepts his religion and often converts to that faith. The *nofotane* however does not have many rights on her husband's land apart

⁷⁰ Latu Latai, "Covenant Keepers: A History of Samoan (LMS) Missionary Wives in the Western Pacific from 1839 to 1979," PhD diss. Australian National University (2016), 49.

⁷¹ Latai, "Covenant Keepers," 49.

from sharing in what is entitled to her husband and children. In many cases, the *nofotane* is, therefore, a resilient person, who often defies expectations in her husband's village, through her agency and determination. I argue that in this sense, *nofotane* can be seen as a *fiaola*, which Vaitusi Nofoaiga articulates as a person who seeks opportunities and ways to help their family survive.⁷² In Nofoaiga's case, being a *fiaola* constitutes an act of survival on land that does not belong to him, as he roams around the town area "selling Samoan hot cocoa drink and collecting bottles around the town area of Apia day and night to help [his] family survive on a leased piece of land near the town area of Apia in the 1980s."⁷³ The *nofotane* also displays the resilience of a *fiaola*, seeking to also survive on land that does not belong to her, but to her husband and children.

3.1.1.2 Nofotane and tofa saili

The struggle of the *nofotane* and the complexities of the environment which the *nofotane* navigates, exposes her to a diverse range of situations that require a change of outlook and perspective. I contend that from this vantage point, the *nofotane* develops a *tofa saili* (searching wisdom). *Tofa* means wisdom, and *saili* means search, which means that *tofa saili* is wisdom of one who continues to search for knowledge. Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi points out that "*Tofa sa'ili* alludes to the idea that one is forever searching for knowledge within the ethical imperatives of humility and love."⁷⁴ Trying to navigate the tension of living on land where one's rights are limited, the *nofotane* would require such *tofa saili*—searching for knowledge—in order to survive on her husband's land. Hence, *tofa saili* aligns well with the spirit and actions of the *fiaola*. Intriguingly, Nofoaiga's discussion of *fiaola* reflects this searching nature of *tofa saili*, as he writes, "*Fiaola* is courageous,

⁷² Vaitusi Nofoaiga, "Jesus the *Fiaola* (opportunity seeker): A Hybrid Samoan reading of Matthew 8:1–17." in *Sea of Readings: The Bible in the South Pacific* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018), 166.

⁷³ Nofoaiga, "Jesus the *Fiaola*," 166.

⁷⁴ Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Taisi Efi, "Bio-ethics and the Samoan Indigenous Reference," in *Suesue Manogi: In Search of Fragrance*, (Wellington: Huia, 2018), 259.

strong-willed, and strategic and is not afraid to enter unfamiliar spaces or relationships to seek help for the family.”⁷⁵ In this way, the *nofotane* can be classified as a *fiaola*, acting the ways of the *fiaola*, and adapting to the context of struggle through *tofa saili*.⁷⁶

3.1.1.3 The Paia woman as *nofotane fiaola* and her *tofa saili*

The Paia woman shows *tofa saili* through her fasting. As mentioned in section 1.3.3 the Paia woman fasts so that she can raise the profile of her family. Indeed, as Efi imagines, the Paia woman through her *anapogi* is essentially searching for knowledge “within the imperatives of humility and love.”⁷⁷ For she is humbled by the ordeal as it invites critique and ridicule from neighbouring villages, yet, out of love for her family, she persists with her *anapogi*. The *anapogi* thus is a manifestation of *tofa saili*.

At the same time, the Paia woman is also a *fiaola* in the sense that Nofoaiga explains, because she takes up her *anapogi* for the survival of her family. Ironically, the *anapogi* weakens her voice and eventually her body. However, she understood the consequences of her *anapogi*, which points to her courage, strong will, and her strategic plan to put her family into a position of wellbeing.

In sum, the Paia woman as *nofotane* has *tofa saili* but also proves to be resilient as a *fiaola*, defying expectations of *nofotane* and the negative stigma that is associated with it. The Paia woman instead shows agency through her decision to *anapogi*, which unveils her attitude of resilience and determination. Significantly, she raises the profile of the village of Paia, and she does so as a *nofotane*.

⁷⁵ Nofoaiga, Jesus the *Fiaola*, 166.

⁷⁶ Nofoaiga, Jesus the *Fiaola*, 166.

⁷⁷ Efi, “Bio-ethics,” 259.

3.1.2 (Re)reading Ruth as *nofotane*

Reading Ruth as a *nofotane* requires further *talanoa*. Ruth is a Moabite, married to an Israelite whose family left Bethlehem for Moab to escape the famine there (1:6–22). It is clear then, that in the Samoan sense of the word, Ruth does not represent a typical *nofotane* because she is not living in Bethlehem. However, I make the argument that Ruth does disclose characteristics of a *nofotane*. To perceive Ruth as a *nofotane*, I want to conduct an intertextual reading between Ruth and the Paia woman. For the purpose of this thesis, I take the position of some of the Paia villagers who see the Paia woman as a *nofotane*. From this standpoint I want to re-read Ruth with a view to highlighting Ruth’s resilience rooted in *fiaola*. At the same time I want to underline Ruth’s searching wisdom as a *nofotane* through *tofa saili*.

In 1:8, Naomi says to Ruth: “May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.” (NRSV) These words from Naomi, were the words of blessings for both Orpah and Ruth. Intriguingly, the second part of Naomi’s blessing points to the extraordinary commitment and ʔʔ of the two *nofotane*: Ruth and Orpah. In particular, Ruth, as a *nofotane*, gave service to Naomi’s family for about ten years (1:4). Naomi recognises the kindness and faithful service of both Ruth and Orpah, as “Naomi’s wish in v. 8 implies that both of her sons’ brides have been kind and loyal to their husbands and to her beyond the call of duty. Naomi hopes that the Lord will follow *their example!*”⁷⁸

Yet, what is intriguing in Ruth’s case, is that she does not want to settle for YHWH’s favour. She does not want her ʔʔ reciprocated. While Naomi asks for YHWH to deal kindly with her daughter-in-law, Ruth does not need YHWH to deal kindly with her, which parallels the Paia woman who does not need food and instead conducts *anapogi*. Instead, Ruth “clung” to her, but

⁷⁸ Farmer, “Book of Ruth,” 904.

why? Hubbard argues that Naomi is in a state of hopelessness as she is “Powerless to repay their kindness, her only recourse was to turn them over to God’s care.”⁷⁹ It might be that Ruth is aware of Naomi’s hopelessness, and feels obligated to continue to care for her. I argue an alternative point. In terms of the theme of “turning” in the book of Ruth, Ruth begins her pushback against “turning” by first clinging to Naomi. Then in 1:16, she asks Naomi not to press her to leave, and not to get her to “turn back” from following her. Here, “Ruth choose[s] the opposite direction from the one Naomi has been urging in verse 15.”⁸⁰ Going the opposite direction is not a rejection of Naomi’s will, but from the perspective of *tofa saili*, it is a searching of knowledge, a searching for an alternative path to what Naomi had on offer.

Strikingly, Ruth is searching for an alternative path to the kindness of YHWH, which might point to Ruth searching for more knowledge about Naomi’s God and land. Daniel Block notes: “How much she knew about the implications of claiming Yahweh as one’s God we do not know. She had indeed been observing Naomi for more than a decade, but from what we have seen of her in this chapter she hardly qualified to be a missionary of orthodox Yahwistic faith and theology. But this is a start, a noble beginning.”⁸¹ Beginning of what? Ruth is taking up a new identity, and although she has spent ten years as a *nofotane*, she wants to learn more. Indeed, it is the beginning of her own search for knowledge about YHWH. She is also now taking up the full sense of being a *nofotane*, as she will now be residing in her dead husband’s land.

As a *nofotane*, this is an incredible show of *tofa saili* by Ruth, and one which seeks to uphold Naomi’s family. Like the Paia woman who starves herself of food for the honour of her

⁷⁹ Robert L. Hubbard, Jr, *The Book of Ruth*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 103.

⁸⁰ Jr. Campbell Edward F., *Ruth: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, AB 7 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 73.

⁸¹ Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 641.

family and village, Ruth also “starves” herself of YHWH’s **חסד** for the honour of Naomi and her family and her God. At the same time, Ruth is the *nofotane* who exhibits the resilience of a *fiaola*, as she not only goes beyond YHWH’s **חסד**, but also goes beyond her homeland, declaring that wherever Naomi goes, she will follow, wherever Naomi lodges, she will lodge also. Ruth puts herself in a position of vulnerability as she ventures into the unknown, but she does so as a *fiaola*, wanting to survive on her husband’s land. In the midst of vulnerability, Ruth shows resilience that is rooted in her *tofa saili*. The *tofa* (wisdom) that she was willing to use to *saili* (search) for Naomi’s God and what YHWH brings for those who are resilient.

3.1.3 Summary

As mentioned earlier, Ruth is not a *nofotane* in the traditional sense, as she is living in her own country. It is her deceased husband and his parents who are foreigners, for they are “גור” [which] is a technical term expressing the position in society occupied by a **גר**, often translated ‘resident alien.’⁸² Ironically, despite Ruth being the “local,” the narrative presents Ruth as a *nofotane*-type figure in the way she has to “turn” or leave and go back to her family. It is in this sense that I re-read Ruth as a *nofotane*, and the spirit of resilience, through *tofa saili* and being *fiaola*, that she shows as a *nofotane*.

In the Samoan context, the *nofotane* should return to her family when her husband dies, especially when they are born with no child. Even if the *nofotane* had spent many years with her husband’s family, there is the likelihood of problems to arise especially with regards to land and land ownership. The concern for land and ownership could result in potential disputes between the

⁸² Fredric W. Bush, *Ruth, Esther*, WBC 9 (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1996), 63.

nofotane and her husband's family, thus, it is less stressful for the *nofotane* to return to her own land. But Ruth does not return. Instead, she clings to Naomi, and goes the opposite direction, following Naomi to the land where she will finally realise her full potential as *nofotane*.

3.2 Ruth as a *tautua*

Our *talanoa* moves to another feature of the Paia woman that presents her resilience, and that is her capacity as a *tautua* (server/servant/service). In the Samoan context, *tautua* is held in high regard as the village promotes the importance of service as the path to authority. This is typified through the Samoan proverbial saying: *O le ala i le pule o le tautua*. (“The path to authority is service.”) For Samoans, reaching the status of *matai* (“chief”) is done through *tautua* (“service”); *tautua* to one's family, the village and the church. I want to re-read Ruth in light of *tautua*, to further highlight her resilience from a Samoan perspective.

3.2.1 Tautua as a Concept

Tautua is a Samoan word that means “service” and “servant.”⁸³ Brian Kolia defines *tautua* as:

The term *tautua* is made up of two words: *tau* and *tua*. In the Samoan language, a lot of its words are constructs of two or more individual words and are best understood when unpacked as such. The word *tau* is a multivalent word which can mean ‘to strike’, ‘to fight’, ‘to strive’ or ‘to pluck’. The essence behind these meanings is that there is effort exerted to produce such actions, which is perhaps best explained through the Samoan expression: *'Malo le tau'* (“Good effort”). The word *tua* means “behind”, or “back”, which indicates a position of humility and service, so the word *tautua* implies someone who strives from the back. *Tautua* therefore is service conducted from a position of humility (*tua*) in honour of those who sit at the front (*luma*). In the Samoan setting, service is always conducted from the back towards the elders, parents and chiefs who sit at the front.⁸⁴

⁸³ Vaitusi Nofoaiga, *A Samoan Reading of Discipleship in Matthew* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 34.

⁸⁴ Brian Fiu Kolia, “Qohelet and Toxic Masculinity: Towards an Ala Theology,” *Zadok Perspectives* S255 (2021), 1.

Hence, *tautua* refers to service (*tautua*) that is conducted by the server (*tautua*) for her/his *matai* (master), *aiga* (family), and village s/he committed her/his life to serve. To highlight Ruth's own *tautua*, I want to read against the *tautua* of the Paia woman.

3.2.2 The Paia Woman as a *tautua*

The Paia woman demonstrates *tautua* through her weaving of fine mats (*ie toga*) and the production of *siapo*. *Ie toga* and *siapo* are important cultural artefacts that are presented as special gifts to people of honour, but also worn by high chiefs and the daughters of high chiefs. For Samoans, *ie toga* represent “respect, prestige, gratitude, deference, recognition, [and] obligation.”⁸⁵ The process of making *ie toga* is time-consuming and arduous, and can take months or years. As Peggy Fairburn-Dunlop notes, the making of *ie toga* “required the careful selection and preparation of pandanus leaves, then months of painstaking weaving to achieve a finished product whose feel and appearance was as fine as linen.”⁸⁶ The care and attention to detail, as well as the meticulous process of making the *ie toga*, ensured the position of *ie toga* making as one of Samoa's most important forms of *tautua*.

Siapo is also highly valued, and was Samoan's original form of clothing.⁸⁷ The process of making *siapo* was also an extremely physical undertaking, requiring the pulling apart bark from the *u'a* (paper mulberry) tree. After, the inner surface (bast) is separated from the outer layer which is discarded. The bast is then laid on a wooden board, and kept wet for the next process, where the *siapo* maker uses a shell to scrape the bark to remove any small specks and other irregularities that

⁸⁵ Malama Meleisea, *The Making of Modern Samoa: Traditional Authority and Colonial Administration in the History of Western Samoa* (Suva: USP, 1987), 52.

⁸⁶ Peggy Fairburn-Dunlop, *Tamaitai Samoa: Their Stories* (Suva: USP, 1998), 9.

⁸⁷ Aumua Mataitusi Simanu, *'O Si Manu a Ali'i: A Text for the Advanced Study of Samoan Language and Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), 328.

might ruin the *siapo*'s final appearance. The bast is then laid out on the *tutua* (anvil) where the bast is beaten with an *i'e* (a small heavy wooden beater), which helps to straighten it out and expand it into a larger size. The beating continues until the bast measures up to the required thickness and size to form the *siapo*. As seen here, the process of *siapo* making is careful and physically demanding, which also makes it an important form of *tautua*.

How extraordinary then, that in spite of the physical nature of the *tautua* and the long hours involved in producing *ie toga* and *siapo*, that the Paia woman chooses to *anapogi* during her work. It is a mark of radical focus and determination, but also a remarkable commitment to her craft and also to her *tautua*.

3.2.3 (Re)reading Ruth as *tautua*

The arduous *tautua* of the Paia woman resonates with Ruth's own laborious commitment to continue to *tautua* for Naomi. Ruth knows exactly that she must continue her *tautua* (service) for her mother-in-law like what she did to her husband (1:8). We do not get a clear picture of Ruth's duties to show that Ruth was a good (*tautua*) servant. Yet, later in the narrative, Ruth goes to the fields and gleans among the ears of grain (2:2–3). However, as noted in section 3.1.2, Naomi's parting words in 1:8 to her daughters-in-law give us insight as to the type of *tautua* that Ruth performed. The kindness and commitment Ruth showed in her *nofotane* was praised by her mother-in-law through Naomi's parting words of blessings. Yet, despite Naomi's attempts to persuade Ruth to return, Ruth responds by refusing to turn back, instead declaring that she will never go back to her Moabite family. Sin-lung Tong notes that "One may think that Ruth has no other option, because her life depends on it. But the fact that Orpah chose to return to her mother's house

indicates that there was still a chance of survival in the land of Moab.”⁸⁸ I argue that in Ruth’s final decision, she reveals the *חסד* which Naomi praises, which also forms the basis of her *tautua* (service) and this *חסד* provides the impetus to continue her *tautua* to her mother-in-law. Farmer argues that Ruth’s show of *חסד* demonstrates “lovingkindness and loyalty that extends far beyond what the law requires, beyond anything the recipient expects or deserves to receive.”⁸⁹ This resonates with the spirit of *tautua* which also goes beyond anything the recipient deserves, whereby *tautua* is employed for the greater good of the community, promoting the wellbeing and prosperity of the family and village.

Further to the communal spirit of *tautua*, I am intrigued by the verb “clung” דבקה (*dā·ḥə·qāh*) which “can also be used to refer to a marriage relationship, as in Gen 2:24; 1 Kgs 11:2, or to Israel’s ideal relationship with God, as in Josh 22:5.”⁹⁰ In these occurrences of the verb, I am reminded of the Samoan concept of *feagaiga* which points to the covenantal relationship between brother and sister, but can also refer to marriage relationships. Here, the brother is a *tautua* to his sister by ensuring her protection and care. The sister in turn becomes the brother’s *feagaiga*. For the Paia woman, her family was her *feagaiga*, and her commitment to her *feagaiga* was shown through her decision to *anapogi*. From a *tautua* perspective, Ruth “clinging” to Naomi makes Naomi a *feagaiga* for Ruth. Ruth, like a brother to his sister, will offer protection and care for Naomi.

⁸⁸ Sin-lung Tong, “The Key to Successful Migration? Rereading Ruth’s Confession (1:16–17) through the Lens of Bhabha’s Mimicry,” in *Reading Ruth in Asia*, edited by Jione Havea and Peter H.W. Lau (Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 37.

⁸⁹ Farmer, “Book of Ruth,” 904.

⁹⁰ Farmer, “Book of Ruth,” 905.

3.2.4 Summary

Re-reading Ruth as a *tautua* allows for us to view Ruth's commitment, focus and determination in the service that she provides for Naomi and her family. *Tautua* also allows for us to view Ruth's resilience against a communal backdrop, one that sees Ruth's *tautua* as a dedication to her *feagaiga*. Although this thesis focuses on 1:6–22, there are implications for reading Ruth's *tautua* in her gleaning. In 3:6 Ruth continues her *tautua* to Naomi, through her obedience of Naomi's instructions and her commitment to care for her through the gleaning in the fields. The service that was conducted by Ruth to her husband's family, is also reflected in the *tautua* that was performed by the Paia woman to her family and village. The making of cultural wealth such as *siapo* and *ie toga* was her priority to ensure the survival and wellbeing of her family. Her commitment to her vow of fasting, highlights her resilience and commitment to make cultural wealth and to sustain its production for the past, present, and future generations of Paia. Similarly, Ruth's resilience also ensures the survival of Naomi's family, which sustains a genealogy from where the Davidic kings emerge.

3.3 Reclaiming the Name of the Woman of Paia

I conclude this *talanoa* by trying to right a wrong, that is the nameless state of the Paia woman. In spite of her resilience and her tale of radical devotion to her family and village, it is alarming that her name is not celebrated by the village of Paia. But without a name, the woman is robbed of her identity and heritage. Without a name, she cannot be celebrated properly.

For Ruth, her resilience caused her to remain steadfast and cling to Naomi as she countered Naomi's request to go back to her mother's house (1:8), by going the opposite direction, taking Naomi's family as her own, and declaring Naomi's God to be her God. Ruth thought of the long

run and what her resilience can bring for her and Naomi. Similarly, the nameless Paia woman persevered through poverty, shame, and hopelessness. The fact that she is nameless may point to traditions that are patriarchal in nature, that is, traditions that seek to suppress identity for the sake of patriarchal agendas. To liberate the woman from name suppression, one must look to what a name carries and what it represents. Let us *talanoa* more. Reading Ruth *with* the Paia woman allowed for a reimagination of Ruth's resilience from a Samoan perspective. At the same time, this *talanoa* must also allow for conversation to flow the opposite direction, to permit the biblical text to speak back to the reader and to the reader's standpoint. The grave injustice of the Paia woman's story is that she is nameless but reading intertextually *with* Ruth, the resonance between the two stories points us to what the Paia woman's name actually represents.

As such, it would be apt to name the Paia woman as *Ruta*, the Samoan translation of the name of Ruth, because she possesses the same resilience and determination as Ruth the Moabite. Like Ruth the Moabite, *Ruta* the Paia woman, lived in times of poverty where sharing and caring for the needs of each other was a priority. Similar to Ruth the daughter-in-law of Naomi, *Ruta* as a *nofotane* was trying to survive on land that belonged to her husband, performing *tautua* that was critical for her family and the village of Paia to survive. Comparable to Ruth's resilience, *Ruta's* resolve was apparent as she remained steadfast to her vow of fasting, enabling her to keep focus and persevere in her *tautua*. These intertextual connections through this *talanoa*, give rise to the character of Ruth and what her name holds, and they are the same values which the Paia woman holds. Her name is *Ruta*. *Ruta's* voice weakens.

CONCLUSION

Reading Ruth in *talanoa* with the story of the Woman of *Paia*—or should we call *Ruta*—allows for us to reimagine Ruth in an alternative light, and focus on her agency and intuition to go against what was considered the conventional path. In the book of Ruth, the theme of “turning” (שוב) is profound, particularly in the first chapter, emphasising (re)turning to one’s original point/place/identity. But Ruth’s action of *not* turning back/returning to her native home is a significant one in relation to the book’s theme, as it highlights her resilience amidst vulnerability and instability. It also makes Ruth a figure of decolonisation, decolonising gender and societal norms. While Ruth’s resilience emerges out of hardships, it also comes about as a result of not having to listen to a man’s instruction. Instead, she shows agency and has the capacity to make her own decisions that impact on her survival in the midst of the famine and also on her future. The *talanoa* promoted her resilience, as like the *nofotane*, we could envision Ruth displaying *tofa saili* (searching wisdom) and becoming a *fiaola* in order to survive and thrive on her husband’s land.

Ruth made a monumental decision in leaving the gods of her native religion, as well as leaving behind her family and her country of birth. She was used to life in her native home, and understood the daily routines of being a Moabite. Making her decision even more daunting was the uncertainty of entering into a new land, worshiping a new God, and taking on the identity of a foreign country. This foreign country, Israel, throughout the Hebrew Bible, was one that held great animosity with Moab. Such is the context of struggle from which Ruth shows great resilience and determination. And it is a feature of the story that must be highlighted in the narrative.

By nature of her resistance, Ruth’s position is a decolonial one. She moves against the “turn” and seeks to go the opposite direction at her own whim, and not under the direction of a man or even God. As a result, she puts herself in a position of risk and vulnerability, but against this

position of uncertainty, she is able to provide for the family, by acting as a *fiola* to survive in the new land. Ruth's decolonising resilience is rooted in her lovingkindness, loyalty, and courage. Her loving kindness (707) promotes a resilience that focuses on the care for her mother-in-law Naomi rather than her own personal interest. Ruth's loyalty promotes a resilience that highlights her commitment to act on her vow to leave her native home, and embrace the change to Naomi's native home. Her courage promotes a resilience where she is determined to go with Naomi, to become a leader, to make difficult decisions, with a view of a better future even if she is on foreign land.

Re-reading Ruth's resilience from a Samoan perspective also extends the *talanoa* on decoloniality. Ruth, who is from Moab, an enemy of the Israelites, has been crossing borders/boundaries for the ten or so years prior to the death of her husband Mahlon. Her border-crossing began from her own native Moabite family to the foreign Israelite family of her husband; subsequently she would cross from Moab to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law Naomi, crossing out of her native family into her new family. However, it is also problematic that Ruth's border-crossing into Bethlehem sees her neglect her nativeness, because in the spirit of *talanoa*, I must acknowledge with respect, the risk of this reading falling into the trope of extolling women for sacrificing themselves for the good of their families, which can result in violence and abuse. In this light, Ruth's border-crossing thus reveals a resilience that should not be romanticised but for us as readers to wrestle with. Despite these trials, Ruth is radically positive about her ordeal.

As such, Ruth's border-crossing is decolonial because she crosses not for the sole purpose of securing unequivocal blessings, but she crosses to uncertainty and ambiguity with the possibility of further hardship. It is this latter part of uncertainty and ambiguity that I argue should be emphasised, firstly, in terms of our own livelihood. Hardships and trials are part of life and the reality we experience today. The stories of the resilience of Ruth and the Paia woman, teach us to focus on our own resilience, to push through the struggle, by being a *fiola* and having *tofa saili*.

Secondly, uncertainty and ambiguity should be given prominence in reading scripture, particularly in the church. For far too often, the position of conventionality is taken uncritically, and the interpretations from these traditional/conventional standpoints seem to perpetuate theologies and understandings that are harmful to people on the margins. This *talanoa* challenges us to rethink our conventional positionality, for there must be a willingness (resilience!) to embrace the place/s and space/s of scepticism and the unknown, to reflect and dwell in these places, so that marginal and subjugated voices are heard and liberated.

I conclude this *talanoa* by coming back to my context, and to think of how Ruth's resilience may inform the ministry of the CCCS. Through her unwavering commitment and adaptability, Ruth's determination and character offer profound lessons rooted in *tofa saili* (wisdom-seeking) and *fiaola* (opportunity seeker). Such that her story encourages the church to foster a community that is foregrounded in resolve and mutual support; a community that resembles that of the traditional Samoan context grounded in *fa'aaloalo* (respect) and *alofa* (love). By embracing these principles, the church can navigate challenges with grace, support its members through hardships, and cultivate a spirit of unity and hope. This approach not only strengthens individual faith and resolve but also builds a resilient and compassionate community that reflects the love and grace of God in every aspect of life.

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