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Tautua a le Niu¹

“O le ala i le pule o le tautua” (the pathway to leadership and authority is through service). Tavale (2013, pp. 6-12) referred to this alagaupu (proverb) as the guiding principle that serves our social, political and spiritual structure that is the aiga (family), nu’u (village), creator (Atua) and country.

‘Tautua a le Niu’ is the metaphoric expression of serving our aiga, our nu’u, our creator and country. This service endeavours to illuminate how Indigenous Samoa live in harmony with self and surroundings. My practice is informed by my life experience growing up in Samoa within my Tofaeono Saofa’imatamua aiga, as expressed in the work of Tavale’s (2013) description of tautua and Efi (2007) discussion on harmony in indigenous Samoan aspirations to have harmony with: the cosmos, between man and the environment, between man and fellow men and between man and self.

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Image 1: Ulu

(F. Filisi, personal collection)

The ulu (head: leaves and coconuts) depicts shelter, protection and provision. The ulu is the fa'amalu (spiritual and physical covering) to the social interactions that occur.

Image 2: Trunk

(F. Filisi, personal collection)

The trunk is symbolic of the physical, mental and emotional strengths and principles by which Samoan indigeneity is governed. It also signifies resilience and adaptation to thrive and survive.

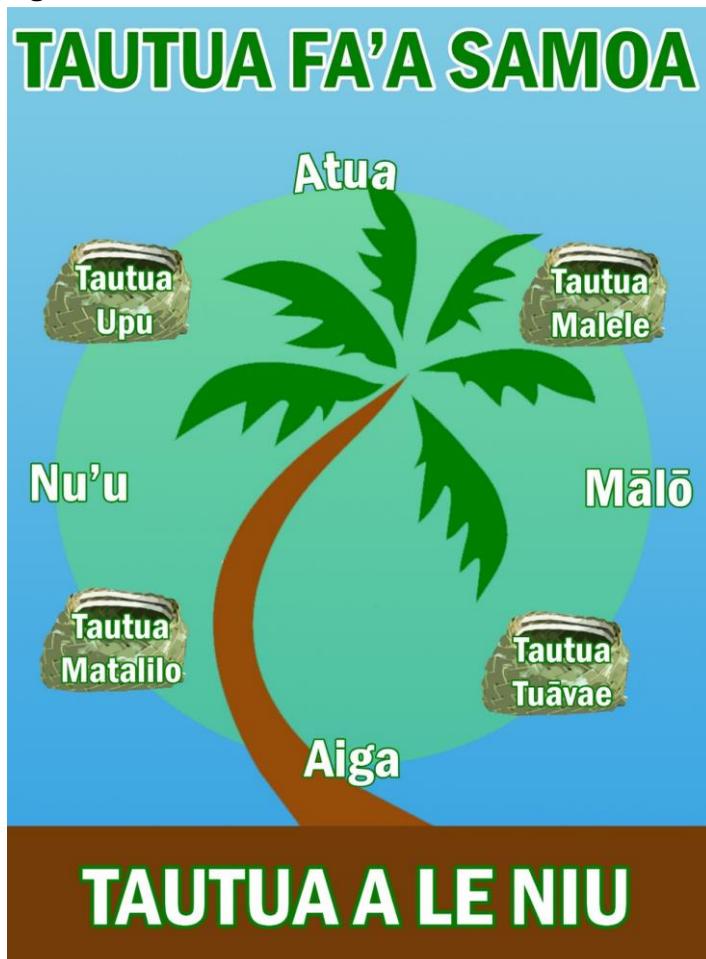
Image 3: Roots



The roots represent foundational connection to aiga, nuu, Atua and country. ‘E tele a’a ole tagata nai lo a’a o le la’au’ (man has many roots than that of the trees), is a proverbial expression of the numerous connections of man to his surroundings. The roots are also used for medicinal purposes, a service for physical healing and well-being.

To illustrate this harmonious living, I have conformed to Tavale (2013) description of four tautua which are: tautua tuavae (provisions), tautua matalilo (serving with honour, respect and protection of aiga), tautua malele (distant provisions), and tautua upu (honouring with spoken words).

Figure 1: Tautua Fa'a Samoa



There are no arrows to point the relationships but all within a circle which emphasize its relationality and connectivity that all subject matters are interconnected.

The concept of Tautua a le Niu finds its origins in ancient Samoa, a gift of the niu from the Tuna to Sina when he dies (Sunia, 2016; *Tala o le Vavau*, 2010; Tauau-Filisi, 2015.,

Tavale, 2012). Tautua a le Niu model is explained in the use of the whole tree, its expressions and connections.

The roots represent foundational connection to aiga, nuu, Atua and country. 'E tele a'a ole tagata nai lo a'a o le niu' (man has many roots than that of the niu), is a proverbial expression of the numerous connections of man to his surroundings. The roots are also used for medicinal purposes, a service for physical healing and well-being.

Connected to the roots is the trunk for building houses. The trunk is symbolic of the physical, mental and emotional strengths and principles by which Samoan indigeneity is governed.

From the trunk to the ulu (head: leaves and coconuts) depicts shelter, protection and provision. The ulu is the fa'amalu (spiritual and physical covering) to the social interactions that occur. Efi (2014, pp.15-17) hypothesized God as the ancestor and progenitor of all living things that potentially brings about these connections in the Samoan indigenous religion.

Physical nourishment is provided by coconuts. The shelter from leaves for thatching roofs and other uses like brooms, baskets etc are still being used today. The coconut husk for afa (sinnet), and coconut shells for bowls and cups as well as dry leaves for firewood are evidence of the tautua a le niu.

Tautua a le niu renders resilience that no matter what the storms of life are, it bends itself and adapts to the wind condition and still produces what is expected. Samoan resistance to the colonisation of culture and language is demonstrated and discussed in (Efi, 2007, 2014; Ma'ia'i, 2016; Meleisea, 1987; O'Brien, 2017; Tavale, 2012; Tuimaleali'ifano, 2006). It has withstood the test of times and its tautua to its people socially and spiritually will continue.

Tautua is woven into emotions, spiritual experience, physical and social inter-actions. Efi (2007, p.1) alluded to four harmonies. When these harmonies come together,

Samoans can say, 'ua pa'u tonu le fuifuiniu i le lapalapa' (the coconut fruits have fallen squarely or rightfully on the coconut palm), a proverb that yields perfect fusion to the perceived reality and outcome.

In explaining this fusion, Tautua a le niu presents each basket with a different type of tautua that serves the indigenous social, political and spiritual structure. Tavale (2013, pp. 6-12) explained the four tautua as listed below.

Tautua Tuavae (Provision)

This tautua is very pleasing to the matai or leader of the aiga. Traditionally, it is self-sufficiency and self-determination to ensure that the crops and the fruit of the land and fish from the moana are brought forward to the matai and he blesses them before sharing with the faifeau (priest), neighbour and family. Abundance of provision means more people to share the bounty with.

Tautua Matalilo (Honour, Respect and Protection)

This tautua is very protective of the family name and makes sure the name is being honoured, respected and protected through the words spoken and the actions that were carried out. As a token for this love, the matai pronounces blessings over his aiga and the possible eventuality of bestowing a title and being a part of the advisory and leadership group in the future.

Tautua Malele (Overseas Funded Projects)

For many Samoans who live overseas, the families at home may ask for financial assistance. This monetary gift also helps the local economy, a service to the country. This tautua is extended to the churches and schools when they fund-raise for building projects. Many representatives have travelled to Aotearoa, Australia and USA for fundraising as many of the aiga are attending schools and churches back

home. The village children receive their education and families back home release their blessings for the tautua.

Tautua Upu (Orator)

Whilst with the aiga, nu'u or church, the language used must be respectful and appropriate as stated by Tuimaleali'ifano (2006) of 'tu' (customary norms) 'ma aga i fanua' (local practice). The next level of tautua upu is to understand the art of lauga (formal speeches). The orator must be able to structure a lauga and deliver it using the title and nu'u fa'alupega. Meleisea (1987, p.vii) defined fa'alupega as the 'formal expression of recognition associated with a matai title. Each village and district has a set of fa'alupega which acts as a constitution by expressing the rank and by alluding to the historical or genealogical origins of its senior titles.' These must be linked through the appropriate use of proverbs and metaphors.

In return for all the four tautua, the matai invokes the blessings: 'Ia fua tele le niu' (may the coconut produce more fruits) meaning to be blessed with heirs to the gafa (whakapapa). Secondly, it releases more blessings for a hundred-fold in return for all the provisions sighted. Thirdly, it seeks the creator to bless the land and the sea for a good harvest.

All the people of tautua feel appreciated, respected, honoured and blessed.

Conclusion

Tautua makes Samoa unique in its indigenous ways of living. Culture may evolve over times but the heart of the tautua fa'aSamoa remains the same, and that is tautua to the aiga, nu'u, Atua and country. Its social, physical, political and spiritual connections are manifested through these tautua that brings harmony to the person and his surroundings.

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