

MEASINA A SAMOA

Misa Telefoni's Commentary

Introduction: National University of Samoa as Intellectual Heart-throb of the Nation

It is always a pleasure for me to return to this magnificent campus of the National University of Samoa. I served for 11 years as Pro-Chancellor (Elect) of NUS, from its humble beginnings until after this great new campus was officially inaugurated.

As a Council member, I stressed the wider role of this institution, as the intellectual and cultural heart-throb of our nation. I stressed the need for occasions to throw open the gates of NUS – both figuratively and metaphorically, to the public at large. I urged a commercially viable and popular bistro cum coffee shop that would draw not just enrolled NUS students, but the public at large, into the campus. I congratulate NUS on its Open Days, and other efforts to make all our people feel a proprietary right over this institution. The holding of public debates on topics such as globalisation; indeed this launching today, all work towards achieving this goal.

NUS must stress accessibility to particular subjects, for those who may not be interested in a degree, but whose thirst for knowledge is satisfied by a particular course. Language courses are a good example – NUS offers courses in Japanese, French, German and soon Mandarin Chinese. Computer courses are another example. Science teachers, who need a better grounding on content in their teaching of science, would also benefit. Science teaching at all levels, is an area needing strengthening in our education system, as evidenced by some tertiary results of our science students.

Measina a Samoa – Need to Define an Audience

Samoan culture and language are no longer subjects of interest only to we Samoans in Samoa. It is arguable that it ever was, especially with Margaret Mead's "Coming of Age in Samoa" being a recommended text in many Universities world-wide. It took another "foreigner" – Professor Derek Freeman, who recently passed away, to finally publish a comprehensive refutation of Mead's classic opus. It could not have come too soon. In particular, our women folk, needed to be rescued from their being stereo-typed world wide, as "loose-women" of dubious morality.

We must recognize, even if we were too unduly relaxed about it before, that we now have a wider audience. We should not be the experimental frontier for two "palagis", as Mead and Freeman were, to come and play cultural and political football over the Samoan psyche. They waged their nature-nurture war, using our people as guinea pigs, to be manipulated according to the particular theory, they may have been committed to proving even before they visited Samoa.

The first challenge for such a publication as "Measina a Samoa", is to define its audience. Is it for academics only or does it seek a wider audience, the general public at large? Is that audience to be both within and without, the confines of our national boundaries? In determining this publication's audience, it becomes necessary to define its *raison d'être*, its "mission statement" as it were, or its "vision", to use the popular vernacular of the moment. We tend to get lost in the terminology, remember when everything was focused on a particular "scenario"?

Words come, and words go, usage reigns supreme however, who in Samoa does not know who a "pe'u" is? I digress however, into the realm of the vernacular, what do I really mean? I shall preface what I say with this Samoan saying: "E le aoaia e Laupua Tamafaiga", as there is no really good equivalent in English for this phrase. What I really mean, in simple terms is:

1. Who is “Measina a Samoa’s” intended audience?
2. What is its purpose?
3. Who will be its major contributors?

The answer to these questions will determine how successful this series of publications will be.

Teaching the Language – Different Techniques for Different Audiences

A lot of controversy has arisen over how to teach the language. Indeed, what language and what grammar? It is important to ensure that we do not confuse how Samoan should be taught for beginners in overseas universities, even New Zealand born Samoans, and a Samoan course for those with a good grounding in the colloquial and biblical or high Samoan. That is similar to the beginners’ English course being compared to English 100 level University papers, which tend to focus on an appreciation of the English literature, rather than the language, which is assumed the student has, for all intents and purposes, already mastered.

For the beginners, the “faamamafa” and the “koma liliu” have to be maintained in our written Samoan language. This had led to our overseas based Samoans insisting that these be an integral part of our written language. The current thinking is to return to the 1870 Bible Samoan as the best illustration of our written language.

NEW ZEALAND BORN SAMOANS – AN AVOIDABLE IDENTITY CRISIS

Samoan language courses should be structured according to the intended students’ capabilities. New Zealand born Samoans, without a fundamental grounding in Samoan language and culture, have a different “psyche” from the Samoan born Samoan, nurtured and grounded in both our language and culture. This “difference” is not just one of perception, it affects New Zealand born Samoans in a very personal way, and many are quite “self-conscious” about that “difference.” I consider this a pity. Instead of

celebrating those differences – in a “Vive la difference” live and let live attitude, they tend to articulate their own awkwardness, because of their perception of their situation. It is almost as if they resent being installed in their self-created, if unique hinterland – not one nor the other – but caught between two cultures.

I gave a Paper on cultural diversity in Utah in July 2001, and I used “The Rock”, Rocky Johnson, as an example of a man at peace with himself. I meant that he was at peace with both his Samoan and African American heritages. I learnt that in America, the Rock is much more widely known than David Tua, and is a better example of cultural diversity.

I am not denying New Zealand born Samoans, may not suffer identity crises. What I do observe is that they should not suffer because of their condition and situation. We are after all, creatures of our environment, as much as the children of our parents, but now I am back in the nature – nurture debate. New Zealand born Samoans are fortunate since every major University in New Zealand offers courses in Samoan Language and Culture, at least to 100 and 200 level papers. This ensures they can acquire more knowledge about their cultural and linguistic heritage, while earning a degree. Given this situation, why are the New Zealand born Samoans so uncomfortable with their situation?

THE MAORI RENAISSANCE – TOO LITTLE TOO LATE?

We who studied at New Zealand Universities in the 1970s, noted Maoris were hell bent on assimilation with their pakeha contemporaries. Their language was all but lost, and their culture all but forgotten. There are lessons for us in the near death of Maori language and culture in the mid 1900s, but ironically, we unwittingly played a major role in the Maori renaissance.

Maoris watched in awe as Samoans practiced their language and culture just as actively in New Zealand, as back home here in Samoa. This jolted them out of their apathy, and although only the most mature Maori academics are prepared to admit this, we are credited with the sudden rekindling of interest which resulted in the Maori renaissance.

This renaissance became so aggressive that the resulting Pakeha backlash is still simmering today. Just one of the hot issues was compulsory Maori language courses for primary school students. Pakehas' resented this proposed so-called "intrusion" into their children's education. Their focus was on the 3Rs and other important curricular which would earn them a living. Indeed a racial battle loomed over what was essentially the basic issue of what the *raison d'être* of an education system should be. We cannot talk, in the 1960s and early 1970s, no Samoan language was taught in any schools at any level. Masiofo Noue Tamasese had to fight the whole Catholic school system to ensure her daughters could be enrolled in Sisters' School with their Samoan surname. You needed a European surname to be enrolled! We are told a young Tofilau Eti Alesana attended school as Eddie Hunkin.

The metamorphoses from those dark colonial days to the present situation, is as much attributable to a change in values and traditions, as to the changing role of education – people literate not only in their chosen disciplines, but empowered with the knowledge required of the modern educated person.

Even the average newspaper article requires at least a basic understanding of economics, history, geography, and even accounting. In our Samoan context, so much of our language is biblical in derivation, and basic bible literacy is a necessary prerequisite to complete literacy in the Samoan language.

So many expressions are now taken straight out of the book of Psalms, Proverbs, and Jesus' teachings – and these expressions have achieved the status of everyday usage, without the need to acknowledge their biblical sources. Some examples include:

*O le faamoemoe ua taunuu, o le laau o le ola lea,
 O le uo i aso uma, a o le uso i aso vale,
 A e faamaoni i mea iti, e tofia oe e te pule i mea e tele.*

CONCLUSION

I must congratulate Tofa Lau Dr Asofou So'o and the editorial staff, for this initiative, the first publication of "Measina a Samoa," which is sponsored by the Institute of Samoan Studies of the National University of Samoa. More local contributions should be encouraged, but of a sufficiently high academic standard, as a "culture of research" is established in the National University of Samoa.

Academic debate is stimulated when contributors boldly express their views, however unconventional and contrary to accepted ideas and traditions. Even stating an ancient and accepted idea, in a new and exciting perspective, provides food for thought. This collection will stimulate the palate.

I have deliberately been general in my observations, avoiding specific comments on specific topics, by contributors, to this first volume of "Measina a Samoa". I have challenged the editorial staff in their preparations for future volumes. This will establish the foundation for many more volumes of "Measina a Samoa" in the future, especially if you focus on a wider audience, both within and outside our borders.

Soifua ma Ia Manuia

God Bless

Misa Telefoni

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