



# Fa'avae: A Samoan Theory of Crime from the 'South' Pacific

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## Abstract

This article presents an interdisciplinary theory on the causes of crime in Samoa. The theory utilises a cultural practice of building the foundation - *fa'avae* - of a Samoan house, to explain the causes of crime and to articulate a crime prevention strategy from the nuances of the word *fa'avae*. The interdisciplinary nature of this theory considers two main aspects of the Samoan life of God and family (*aiga*) to describe both the causes of crime in Samoa, and a way forward to restore *aiga* and community fractured by crime. The theory calls upon the church through church ministers – *faiifeau* – to become active in the public sphere. This entails speaking out about the causes of crime and working in collaboration with other stakeholders in devising culturally appropriate crime prevention approaches for Samoa, likely to also be familiar to other 'South' Pacific nations.

**Keywords:** Public theology; Fa'avae; Samoa; Pacific criminology; Faiifeau.

## The Case for a Theory on Crime from the 'South' Pacific

A great deal of recent scholarship has pointed out the inappropriate dominance of Northern criminology theories. A prime factor claimed to be behind this is the Orientalist attitude that has prevented Western academics from seeking knowledge from supposedly primitive non-Western sources. To be more precise, criminology has traditionally, and possibly still is, dominated by white men from the United States and the United Kingdom, where criminological scholarship is widely published, cited and taught. This dominance marginalises non-Western expertise and experiences, despite the fact that non-Western criminologists regularly entertain Western criminological theories and ideas (Moosavi 2019: 257). However, the origins, orientation, and institutional development of criminology have remained predominantly influenced by Northern-based scholarship, as pointedly observed by Stanley Cohen in Forsyth, Dinnen and Hukula (2020) and in Carrington, Hogg and Sozzo's (2016) more recent discussions on Southern criminology. There is a hint of favouritism here that privileges Europe as the unique home of the innovative, the creative, the thoughtful, and the active (Forsyth et al. 2020). There is also a tendency for theories generated in the Global North to be imported into the Global South or, as Connell in Carrington et al. (2016: 2) term it, 'into the periphery'.

However, there is a lack of reciprocity or two-way learning. For Connell in Carrington et al. (2016), the problem is not a lack of ideas from the periphery, but a deficit in their recognition and circulation. The issues facing Southern criminology and the lack of recognition of the Global South have caused Braithwaite (2013) to call on criminologists from the Pacific Islands region to get directly involved in the debates about paths to democracy, igniting that which starts from the periphery of society rather than keeping the focus at the centre. Other criminology scholars argue that ignoring non-Western scholarship is a global loss and that the Global North has much to learn from emerging new Southern criminologies, such as Asian criminology and African criminology.

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At the same time, Moosavi (2019) is adamant that the more recent development in Southern criminology through Carrington et al's work *Southern Criminology* is 'probably the most significant theoretical development in the recent period' (2019: 257). What is clear here is that developments from Asia and the South are promising in the effort to decolonise criminology. All factors considered, however, criminology remains Western-centric owing to the complex mixture of Orientalist attitudes, limited non-Western scholarship, perceptions of non-Western inferiority and discrimination against non-Western scholars and scholarships (Moosavi 2019).

But critique is not enough - we need to generate new theory. In developing a theory of crime for Samoa, the recommendations made by Forsyth et al. (2020) are vital. In shaping public Pacific criminology, three prominent aspects need to be considered.

Firstly, the theory must be interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. Forsyth et al. (2020) recommend that Pacific criminology should involve players from diverse backgrounds such as law, anthropology, psychology, social work, sociology, development studies, peace building, and those working in institutions responsible for providing security services. Additionally, Pacific criminology must be inclusive of victims and survivors of crime and violence. There also needs to be a partnership between stakeholders like police, academics, police officers, village leaders, the private sector, and local civil society organisations, as well as research priorities identified by those impacted by crime and violence (Forsyth et al. 2020).

Secondly, research should be grounded in a solid ethical foundation. Participants often share stories to inform policymakers in the hope that doing so will lead to improving their own lives and those of their children. This creates an obligation on researchers to ensure that information collected is presented meaningfully and can contribute to national and local debates on policy. This obligation calls on researchers to be innovative in how they collect data, for instance, through creative arts, social media, radio and other modes of communications. More importantly for this theory on crime, is Forsyth et al.'s (2020) idea that the researchers need to be inclusive by including the views of tribes, clans, local churches, and civil society.

Thirdly, it is recommended that any Pacific criminology must be founded on an awareness of plurality and recognition of variations in the configuration of different actors in security and justice landscapes across time and space. This recommendation seeks to understand the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches in particular settings (Forsyth et al. 2020). In summary, Forsyth et al.'s (2020) call for the need to support Pacific Island research institutions and practitioners to enable their engagement in criminological research and development of new methodologies and theoretical tools, thereby creating more sustainable and relevant solutions to the provision of justice and security for the region (Forsyth et al. 2020). This said, it is time to consider what Pacific criminology might look like within the specificities of Samoa through the Samoan practice of building the foundation – *fa'avae* of a traditional house, *fale*.

### **Building a Traditional Samoan Foundation (*Fa'avae*)**

The term *fa'avae* primarily originates from the fields of architecture and construction but can also be applied to cultural, social, biblical, and theological practices. Foundations are crucial for the stability of any structure. The stronger the foundation, the more stable the house - *fale*. The word for foundation—*fa'avae*—comes from *fa'a* (to give) and *vae* (feet): *fa'avae* thus literally means 'to give feet'. The *fa'avae* is made up of many rocks and stones, big and small; when creatively worked into position, the rocks and gravel form a raised, stable and compacted surface upon which the *fale* is built. Each element used to build the *fa'avae* has its own independent but interdependent role and responsibility in ensuring the *fale* remains upright. Samoans understand the *fa'avae* as strong, rigid, firm, stable, and immovable. In the Samoan worldview, *fa'avae* is thus understood as being reliable. The *fa'avae* keeps the *fale* sturdy in times of strong winds and storms. From a cultural and theological perspective, the *fa'avae* for all Samoan families are God, family, *aiga* and the Samoan way, *fa'aSamoa*.

*Fa'avae* as a compound word is usually interpreted with the expectations of being strong, still, static, and firm. But it can also embrace a less commonly used understanding of *fa'avae* found in language, *Gagana*; what I mean here is that what I am proposing has not been explored before. Instead of *fa'avae* being immutable and fixed, as it is traditionally understood by Samoans, in my PhD thesis (2020) *Courting a public theology of fa'a-vae for the church and contemporary Samoa*, I coined the idea of a *fa'avae* that is mobile, indicated by a hyphen, to symbolise mobility, movement, and change (Amosa 2020: 95).

This nuance of *Fa'a-vae* includes being forward-thinking and progressive. It also implies moving away and leaving behind traditional perspectives, ideas, and concepts. This shift in meaning can signify a departure from how things are usually performed and conducted. *Fa'avae* highlights the shift from a once static and traditional understanding of how things operate to *fa'a-vae*, which shows a moving away from conventional ways and thinking, thus shaking and fracturing the foundation (Amosa 2020).

In restoring the shaken and fractured foundation, I developed a third nuance of the word *fa'avae* - (*fa'a* (-) *vae*) to denote a solution, an approach or strategies aimed at restoring the foundation to its original static, strong and firm nature. For example, from a builder's perspective, if there are cracks in a house's foundation, then the strategy is to use concrete mix to fix the cracks and restore the foundation to its original state. In terms of crime and crime prevention, this article's way of fixing the fractured social foundation is through the interdisciplinary discipline of public theology.

### ***Fa'avae: A Theory on Crime from Samoa***

In keeping with recommendations made by Forsyth et al. (2020), the theory of *fa'avae* is interdisciplinary. It weaves social theories, cultural concepts, nuances of words, as well as a turn to public theology, to explain the causes of crime in Samoa and how to pave possible ways forward to prevent crime. The task of developing a Pacific theory of crime is both critical and constructive. In developing a Pacific theory of crime for Samoa and the Pacific region, this article will argue that creating a new theoretical approach relevant to Samoa involves two dimensions: one Christian and the other cultural. In other words, it must consider the role of Samoan culture - *fa'a Samoa*, represented by the family - *aiga* and the role of the Christian faith as foundations, strengthened by the recent amendment to the Constitution, which identified a trinitarian formula emphasising the importance of the principles found in the three nuances of *fa'avae* (Amosa 2020).

At present, the strong and firm nature of what a foundation *fa'avae* is understood to be by Samoans regarding the church is changing. This is illustrated by a recent court case *Reupena v Senara*, where a church minister took the Congregational Christian Church Samoa (CCCS) (Samoa's largest denomination), to court after being denied a fair hearing.<sup>1</sup> *Reupena* was stripped of his status as a church minister of the CCCS, for not obeying the church elders committee directive, which asked him to make peace and reconcile with other church ministers in *Reupena's* diocese. The dispute arose after a falling-out over *Reupena's* decision to purchase land in Queensland for building a compound intended to serve as the diocese headquarters.<sup>2</sup> In Chief Justice *Sapolu's* 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2016 judgement, he said: '[T]his case is complex. It involves novel legal issues as far as Samoan Law is concerned. It is the first case on ecclesiastical law in Samoa. The facts are not simple'.<sup>3</sup> The court case highlighted the increasing lines of fracture between the church and the legal system. At the same time, it demonstrated how the issue of unfair dismissal was not resolved by the customary ways of the *fa'a Samoa*, a clear indication that the relationship between the foundations of Samoa, the church and *fa'a Samoa* have become unstable. A former consensus seems to be breaking down. Any movement causes cracks in the structure of the *fa'avae*, as the court case exemplified, and creates tensions between the pillars of Samoan society of church and family – *aiga*. The theory of *fa'avae* argues that such movement signifies a breakdown is imminent, and in some cases, may lead to acts of crime.

It is first helpful to lay out the idea of *fa'avae* because it is the common factor that holds both the Christian and the cultural dimensions of this theory, together, mutually supporting each other.

The Christian dimension of the *fa'avae* theory of crime in Samoa is taken from Samoa's motto, "Samoa is founded on God" - *Fa'avae ile Atua Samoa*. The motto can be considered a theory that during Samoa's struggles for independence from the United Kingdom, Germany, and New Zealand summed up the people's conviction about God. The phrase *Fa'avae ile Atua Samoa* was coined in 1948 by *Sauni Kuresa*, a local composer, when he was asked to write and compose an anthem now known as the banner of freedom – *Ole fu'a o le saolotoga* for Samoa's preparation for Independence.<sup>4</sup> The anthem contained the words 'Don't be afraid; God is our foundation' - *aua ete fefe ole Atua o le ta fa'avae* (Amosa 2014: 68). On 3 April 1951, the second Legislative Assembly decided to use the phrase as Samoa's motto, and a week later, on 12 April 1951, *Fa'avae ile Atua Samoa* appeared in public for the first time in Samoa's newly developed Coat of Arms. The Coat of Arms was officially recognised on 1 June 1962 at the Independence ceremony at *Mulinu'u* (Amosa 2014) and continues to serve and advertise Samoa's social, political, cultural, and theological ideas, the cornerstone of which is that God is the foundation of Samoa.

When the spiritual life of families experience movement, cracks can appear in the structures of the *aiga*. Christianity was introduced in 1830 by the London Missionary Society (LMS) (now known as The Congregational Christian Church Samoa [CCCS]) (Tuiai 2012: 1). Upon introduction of Christianity, the majority of Samoans were members of the then LMS. Over time, this changed, and now only 31.8% of Samoa's population are LMS members. Currently, 57.4% of the population identify as Protestants. More specifically, 31.8% comprise the CCCS, 13.7% belong to the Methodist Church, 8.0% align themselves with the Assembly of God (known officially as the World Assemblies of God Fellowship) and 3.9% belong to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. Of the remaining Christians, 19.4% are Roman Catholic, 15.2% are Mormons, 1.7% follow the Worship Centre, and 5.5% make up other forms of Christianity. Of the remaining population, 0.7% identify with different religions, namely Islam and Baha'i. A small percentage of people, 0.1%, either do not belong to a denomination or are atheists. One percent are unspecified (Amosa 2020).

The landscape of the Samoan religious and spiritual life has dramatically changed since 1830. This article is mindful of the changes and serves as another example showing that the foundations of Samoan spiritual life are no longer as firm as they once were. Samoa's religious climate is now more mobile, and as the figures above indicated, people no longer identify themselves solely with the CCCS, and have moved away from the main church. The court case discussed above marked a significant change in the relationship between the law and *fa'aSamoa*, and the CCCS. It set a precedent that later led the government to take the church to court on taxing church ministers, indicating a departure from traditional practices in Samoa (Amosa 2020).

The cultural dimension, symbolised by the *aiga*, can also represent the household of life. According to Tofaeono (2000), the *aiga* is a centre for nourishment and sustenance, where every member engages in relational and sustaining fellowship. The *aiga* is maintained through an interdependent web of the richness of a specific locality where every member of the *aiga* shares in its blessings (Tofaeono 2000). Regarding crime, the *fa'avave* theory suggests crimes result from movement and cracks appearing in the foundations of families, *aiga*. These cracks go back to the idea that the *aiga* is the centre of nourishment and sustenance; if individual members of the *aiga* are not playing their independent but interdependent role in keeping the *aiga* functioning, cracks can form in the foundations, indicating that a breakdown in *fa'avave* is imminent. It will eventually contribute to social issues, including criminal activities. How does *fa'avave* then speak to the issue of crime and crime prevention in Samoa? Nuances of the word *fa'avave* will help in answering this question.

### Articulating the *Fa'avave* Theory

The first nuance of the word *fa'avave* indicates that the foundations or structures are fixed, firm, stable and intact because each stone, rock, pebble, and grain of sand plays its individual but interdependent role in sustaining and maintaining the *fa'avave*. This keeps the *fale* (house, family) sturdy and upright during strong winds and storms. For example, led by the high chief (*matai*), the *aiga* comprises many people, each having individual but interdependent roles in keeping the *aiga* functioning. Parents teach their children according to the ways of Samoa: respect, obedience, service, and love, in addition to providing a safe place for children to be educated and nurtured. Children have their roles to play in keeping the *aiga* functioning. They serve (*tautua*) the parents and ensure that parents and younger siblings are cared for by working the plantations to provide food for the *aiga*. Children blessed with employment will serve the parents by helping with extended family obligations (*fa'alavelave's*) and church obligations. When everyone plays their part, the *aiga* continues to be the place of nurturing and sustenance.

The second nuance - *fa'a-vae* – denotes that the once fixed, firm and intact *fa'avave*, has now fractured. Considering the *aiga* as an example of *fa'avave*, something has caused the *aiga* to become fragmented. Many reasons may cause conflict, friction, and separation within the *aiga*, including issues related to finances, cultural obligations, church obligations or children deviating from the ways they were taught by their parents and refusing to fulfil their roles in the *aiga*. One thing is clear: a change in the *aiga's* makeup has caused the *fa'a-vae* to separate, shifting from a firm and static *aiga* to an *aiga* now experiencing conflict.

Data collected from the Samoa Police, Prison and Correction Services highlight burglary and theft as the most prevalent offences, with individuals aged between 18-40 being the main offenders. According to police, the need to fund the purchase of illicit drugs, including methamphetamine and cocaine, is the primary reason behind the crime. The second most noticeable high crime in Samoa involves narcotics. Police information reveals that males between the ages of 18-60 and females between 18-40 are the main offenders. These two crimes are committed by repeat offenders or those known to police.

This data suggests a correlation between crime in Samoa and ruptures within the *aiga*, where members not playing their roles may contribute to instability and criminal behaviour.

The *Samoa Observer* (2023) published a story titled 'Crime, lost opportunities, and excelling in life'. The article's premise suggested the apple does not fall far from the tree in terms of character and personal conduct, referring to a child following in the criminal footsteps of a parent. Sadly, this repeatedly plays out in Samoa. For example, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2024, the Ministry of Police, Prisons, and Correction Services released a statement confirming a police raid that resulted in the arrest of a former Samoa Fire and Emergency Services Authority worker and his son for drug possession. In the raid, officers from the *Faleata* Police Station discovered a plastic bag containing meth, marijuana leaves, marijuana seeds, and electronic devices at the suspects' residence. While due legal process will determine the outcome, this case points to concerns about a breakdown in moral conduct and responsibility within the family and could indeed be a case of the apple not falling far from the tree, in which a young man with a bright future ahead of him gets entangled in his father's misdeeds.<sup>5</sup>

Several other incidents reported by *Samoa Observer* (2019a)<sup>6</sup> illustrate how the *fa'avave* of the *aiga* have been shaken and fractured by crimes such as incest, rape, drug trafficking and family violence. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2019, it was reported that

a father was charged with one count of sexual connection and two counts of sexual assault of his 12-year-old daughter on three separate occasions. The Supreme Court condemned the father's actions and sentenced him to jail, with the judge pointing out that the father had breached his legal duties as a father. In another case, the *Samoa Observer* (2020a)<sup>7</sup> on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February reported on a father raping his second daughter while being out on parole after a conviction for raping his first daughter. The father was publicly condemned by Samoans as reported by *Samoa Observer* (2020b)<sup>8</sup>. In terms of family violence, reports from the *Samoa Observer* (2018a)<sup>9</sup> keep Samoans informed about issues that impact families and contribute to social problems and crimes. Yet, its efforts can only go so far. Statistics reported by the paper (2018a) highlighted that 90% of intimate partner violence in Samoa goes unreported. Disturbingly, 86% of women in these cases believe their abuse is normal or not serious. The *Samoa Observer* (2019b)<sup>10</sup> also reported on a landmark Samoan Family Violence Study which revealed that 9.5% of women reported being raped by a family member in their lifetime, and an earlier study found one in five women had been raped by their partner.

It is clear in such cases that the foundation of the *aiga* has fractured, and the reports point to a change in people's characters and personal conduct. In some cases, changes in circumstances can influence family members' behaviours, leading to detrimental effects and resulting in criminal activities against family members, such as incest and intimate partner violence. These changes in behaviours have fractured the traditional understanding of a solid *aiga*. The issue lies in the rate at which change occurs. In cases like intimate partner violence, some women now believe that the abuse is normal, because they have become accustomed to it, indicating there is something wrong with the original foundation. In order to restore the fractured foundation, a more stable one is needed. Importantly, it does not necessarily mean a patriarchal-led foundation, but rather one where all members of the *aiga* are valued.

The third *fa'a (-) vae* represents a restored family, *aiga*. This nuance emphasises that the parenthesis (-) symbolises a crime prevention approach that could serve as a catalyst for changing the detrimental situations faced by the *aiga* or individuals. In addressing crime and improving situations involving criminal behaviour, the theory of *fa'avae* will use the interdisciplinary field of public theology as an example of a crime prevention approach. This approach aims to address crime issues in Samoa and assist both offenders and victims in transitioning from a life of crime to a once-fractured, now restored *fa'avae*.

In line with Forsyth et al.'s (2020) second recommendation, the idea of researchers being more public in their approach is noted here. A public theology of *fa'avae* seeks to address crime and crime prevention by publicly discussing crimes, their causes of crime, and the lack of action by policymakers, villagers, academics, social workers, and the church. Public theology holds people publicly accountable for failing to highlight crime and the reasons behind it. With the idea of the *fa'avae* as its centre, this theory examines the church's role while exploring how it relates to the other structural pillars of Samoan society, aiming to show how *fa'avae* then speaks to crime and crime prevention. The overarching question of this section is: How might a public theology of *fa'a-vae* provide solutions to current cases involving the church, law, government and *fa'aSamoa* that contribute to crime? Those who practise public theology have always been aware that there must be a relevant and living connection between the method and claims of public theology and its local and contextual application.

For public theology to establish itself further in Samoa, there is a pressing need to explain further what a public theology is. While this may no longer be necessary for many countries, Samoa's context means this type of theology is still in the process of becoming known. Storrar (2007) described how interest in and the practice of a public theology have become a glocalised phenomenon. This means it has become a global intellectual flow – like liberation, ecological and feminist theologies – but is expressed in ways peculiar to its local context. How it is expressed in practice depends upon the specific context in which it is located. In this respect, it is worth heeding the insights of John de Gruchy. Writing about South Africa from the perspective of practitioners during and following the fall of apartheid, de Gruchy believes there is no universal public theology; instead, there are only theologies that engage with the political realm within their local contexts (Gruchy 2007).

The practice of public theology was initially established in the United States. The term public theology is credited to Martin Marty, who saw the need for a public church (Marty 1981: 16). Marty became increasingly concerned that the church was slowly withdrawing from the public space. He observed that churches appeared to be more concerned with their own denominational requirements and less engaged with public issues. Marty worried that the churches were adopting a mentality of 'all about me and my God' - focusing on 'who is Jesus Christ for me, my family and friends and for people like me' (Marty 1981: 16).

Marty argued that the public church must create at the local level an experience akin to the intensity of a tribal community, meaning that the church should act as a dialectical partner with others. He advocated for the church to step beyond its denominational boundaries and converse with others for the common good. Marty noted that public theology involves interpreting the life of a people in the light of a transcendent reference. The people, in this case, are not simply the church but

the plurality of people with whom the church interacts on a larger scale. The public church then is characterised by its specific Christian polity and witness (Marty 1981).

Dirk Smit (2007: 431) agrees. In seeking to address the question ‘what constitutes a public theology?’, Smit argues that a public theology must be biblical and theological, prophetic, and inter-contextual. It is his conviction that a public theology should be about what affects human beings, whether it is described as flourishing, well-being or the common good.

In a variation on this theme, Hollenbach (1976: 299) has argued for a public theology that addresses ‘urgent moral questions’ of our time using church symbols and doctrines of the Christian faith. Moltmann (1999) has discerned how theology must reflect the nature of God’s Coming Kingdom publicly; for Moltmann, there is no Christian identity without public relevance, and there is no public relevance without theology’s Christian identity. In this sense, Moltmann (1999) argues that theology must be public theology. According to Max Stackhouse in Vanhoozer and Strachan (2004: 18), ‘it intends to offer the world not our confessional perspective but warranted claims about what is ultimately true and just that pertains to all’.

For Forrester (2004), a public theology attends to the Bible and the tradition of faith; simultaneously, it attempts to discern the signs of the times, and understand what is going on in the light of the gospel. Christian public theology must thus ‘seek the welfare of the city’ before protecting the interests of the church and its claims to preach the gospel and celebrate the sacraments. A public theology seeks to speak to Christianity’s universal responsibility. Ultimately, it talks about God and claims to point to publicly accessible truth. It thus contributes to the public discussion by bearing witness to a reality that is relevant to what is happening in the world and, to the pressing issues facing people and societies today (Forrester 2004). It strives to offer something distinctive, and that is the gospel, rather than merely adding the voice of theology to what everyone is already saying; public theology seeks to deploy theology into a public debate (Forrester 2001).

The legacy significantly informs the shape of public theology, particularly regarding the audience described by David Tracy. For Tracy (1981: 5), ‘all theology is public discourse’ because it addresses universal existential questions faced by individuals or society, to which theologians seek to provide solutions. Tracy identifies three public audiences that require answers: society, the academy, and the church. This three-fold division needs to be better recognised within the Samoan setting.

Tracy (1981) believes that every theologian, therefore, addresses these three publics. Society encompasses the economic realm, politics, and culture, with a focus on social justice and the needs of the poor. The academy provides the intellectual context for contemporary theology, necessitating rational dialogue and interaction with other fields of knowledge and inquiry. The church identifies the theologian’s commitment to the living tradition of a faith community (Tracy 1981).

Tracy argues that many theologians tend to address only one of these three publics. For instance, the broader society typically is the concern of *practical* theologians. The academy is usually the concern of *fundamental* theologians. The church is the responsibility of *systematic* theologians. Tracy thus calls on theologians to address all three realms, with the purpose to drive not towards private-ness, but an authentic public discourse. Ford (1999: 19-21), reframes and renames the three publics: he writes about three targeted audiences in what he calls an ‘ecology of responsibility’. These audiences are the church, academics, and institutions.

The purpose of a public theology then is to participate in the divine economy of God's love and care, grace, and blessing, wisdom, and truth. Himes and Himes (1993) speak of a public theology that emphasises an ethical commitment to the public sphere, rather than focusing on particular agendas. Storrar’s (2007) public theology is a collaborative exercise in theological reflection on public issues, prompted by disruptive social experiences that call for a thoughtful and faithful responses. According to Graham (2013), public theology concerns itself with the church’s relationship to the world, including political powers, economic problems, governance, moral questions, citizenship and national identity.

The task of public theology is to determine how to engage with these issues from a theological point of view. Writing in *The Pastor as Public Theologian*, Vanhoozer and Strachan (2015: 16) state that public theology is ‘theology in and for the public square’. It addresses common concerns in an open forum, where no creed or confession holds pride of place. Christians are encouraged to bear witness to their faiths in the public square (Pearson 2015). More recently, social media has been designated as a fifth sphere (Pearson 2015). Habermas (1991) saw the public sphere as an open forum which brings together private people to form a public. In his public theology, Kim and Day (2017) further refined Habermas's spheres into the state, media, religious communities, market, academics and civil societies.

Two examples demonstrate where public theology has been used as an approach to addressing problems impacting the common good of Samoa. The first was explored by Ah Siu-Maliko (2014) to bring to the public space the issue of violence against women in Samoa. The subject of her public theology is a courageous choice. In Samoan customary practice, matters of domestic

violence are typically not discussed in the public sphere. The received custom is for such matters to remain within the domain of the *aiga* (extended family relationships).

Ah Siu-Maliko (2021) challenges this traditional way of thinking in pursuit of a social justice that challenges a patriarchal and hierarchical culture. This should be understood alongside her public appearances on social media, in the news media and through working in solidarity with other women's groups, and non-governmental organisations (2021). Ah Siu-Maliko, in an article with the *Samoa Observer* (2019b) said that she believes by rolling out the fine mat of scripture, church leaders and parishioners can work through the challenges of violence, a problem she says has been too often ignored or avoided by the church.

Several recommendations were actioned because of Ah Siu-Maliko's advocacy in the public sphere against domestic violence. One of these includes a landmark family violence study, along with her continuing advocacy work challenging the Methodist Church to be prophetic and speak out about violence against women. As part of the interdisciplinary discipline of public theology, she took her public stance about violence against women to local seminars and conferences, including one at the National University of Samoa, an event which the *Samoa Observer* (2018b) headlined as: 'Church should break silence on domestic violence'.

The second example concerns a public theology of land by Charles Tupu (2022), a lecturer at Piula Theological College, Samoa in his PhD. The issue at hand for Tupu is the *Land Title Registration Act* 2008 that allowed customary land to be leased. The bill sparked considerable debate and disputes, leading to instances of criminal activity. Tupu argued for the need to care for customary land in Samoa. Tupu argued for the necessity of protecting customary land in Samoa, noting that 81% of the land is held by customary rights. However, this is threatened by the government's strategic development plan, implemented through the Ministry of Finance, seeking to use 'unused lands' (Tupu 2022). The dilemma extends beyond merely the end goal of a theory and practice of development; it also involves the means by which that end is achieved. While the purpose of economic development may be to improve infrastructure and services to enhance Samoa's well-being as measured by GDP (Tupu 2022: 34), Tupu identifies a stumbling block: how the land protected under the Constitution is impacted by commercial use. In these circumstances, much depends upon the relationship of trust, respect and accountability between the high chief, or *matai*, and the extended family, or *aiga potopoto* (Tupu 2022). The rightful owners of the land are the *aiga potopoto*, and they have the right to determine who is their *matai*.

In customary practice, land comes under the authority of the *matai* and is associated with traditional titles and honorifics. The risk that arose as a consequence of the *Land Title Registration Act* 2008 is in its specifying that land must be registered under an individual name. Tupu (2022: 34) concludes that this law effectively transfers legal ownership of customary land to the registered individual, creating a disconcerting prospect: what happens if the registered individual uses the land for 'collateral to secure funds for development purposes but fails to repay the mortgage?' In such an instance, the *aiga potopoto* could lose their lands and face displacement. Tupu (2022) advocated for the need to take care of customary land to prevent the displacements of *aiga* and to prevent the *aiga potopoto* from committing criminal acts against the traditional title holder, the *matai*. Currently, a number of cases in Samoa involving families in disputes over either the right to the land or ownership of land have resulted in criminal acts. In restoring the fractured *aiga*, I propose the idea of a public church minister, *faiifeau*, as a crime prevention strategy.

### **A Public *Faiifeau*: A Crime Prevention Strategy**

In Samoa, the church minister, *faiifeau*, holds a privileged position in both the villages and in Samoan society. They are graduates of theological colleges and called to be servants of God in the villages. Samoans believe *faiifeaus* are the physical manifestation of the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, as well as of Samoa. Thus, *faiifeaus* are afforded honour and respect. They are well cared for in terms of daily necessities and protected by their village and congregation from potential issues that could affect the common good of the members, the church and village. *Faiifeaus* from the CCCS are bound by church policy and to their duties within the village. They are expected to focus solely on their church calling in the villages, primarily through the pulpit. For theological students and graduates to act as public spokespersons on issues outside the pulpit was to enter roles not traditionally associated with their responsibilities as church ministers or theological educators. To be a public *faiifeau* or public theologian was once considered beyond expectations (Amosa 2020). In short, *faiifeaus* are traditionally not allowed to engage in discussions or express views on public issues that contradict church policy, views or the church constitution. So, advocating for a public *faiifeau* to address issues in Samoan society, including crimes, is a difficult task, but not an impossible one.

The theory of *fa'avae* calls on the church, police, academics, institutions, civil society, policymakers, government and other players, as recommended by Forsyth et al. (2020), to each play their independent but interdependent role in speaking out about crime in the public domain. To articulate the *faa'vae* theories of crime prevention approach, I examine the church's public role, especially relating to church ministers, and how they can become prophetic public ministers speaking out about the causes of crime. Ministers of religion need to be public *faiifeaus* who extend their influence beyond the pulpit and into the public sphere. The new congregation comprises stakeholders who can help address issues affecting the common good of individuals and Samoa.

I am emphasising that church ministers need to become agile in the public sphere. They must leave their traditional ways of operating and become prophetic public *faiifeaus* speaking out against problems that affect Samoa's common good. In shifting the pulpit to become public so that theology can be performed publicly, it will reach a more extensive audience. By this I do not mean that *faiifeaus* must do open-air preaching, but rather, they must be the prophetic voice through social media, news media and during public gatherings and consultations advocating for ways to assist the flourishing of society. The *aulotu* (congregation) will now widen to comprise stakeholders – the police, government ministries, non-government agencies, private sector and institutions, collaboratively consulting on policies, approaches, and ways to address crime and giving-feet to Samoa.

Nigel Biggar's (2011) work, *Behaving in public: How to do Christian ethics*, sought to answer important questions: Can Christians speak authentically and responsibly in public? Can their theological arguments behave? And if so, how? Biggar concluded that a theological argument can and should engage publicly on its own terms and sometimes in its own unique way. Biggar was writing from a pluralist context comprising multilingual<sup>11</sup> and secular publics that contained non-Christians. Biggar argued that the Christian contribution to public discourse should not confine itself to the modes of sweet reason. Sometimes, Christians must stop being wise and start playing the prophet. Now, Samoa is neither pluralist nor entirely polyglot nor secular. The majority of Samoans are Christians, with a minute percentage of the population identifying as non-Christian. Biggar emphasises that, on occasion, Christians must contribute to public discourse and become prophetic, and calls for Christians to become involved in discussing issues concerning the common good of society in public spaces.

Vanhoozer and Strachan (2015) describe three main tasks of a public pastor-theologian. They argue that first, the pastor must be a theologian. Second, every pastor is, in some sense, a public theologian, and the third task is to highlight that a public theologian is a particular kind of generalist. What Vanhoozer and Strachan mean by the pastor needing to be a specific kind of generalist is that the pastor must either specify the specialist knowledge they have or take up the mantle of the intellectual. For Vanhoozer and Strachan (2015), a generalist pastor-theologian must possess a certain kind of intelligence and authority to address general philosophical and social issues. Vanhoozer and Strachan (2015) identified Tracy's (1981) three publics, the church, academy and wider society, as key social locations where the pastor needs to engage. Vanhoozer and Strachan (2015) contend that a public pastor needs to be trilingual, to talk in the language of all three social locations - church, academy and the wider society.

The *faiifeau* has always been regarded as a wise man. Given the concerns around crime increases in Samoan society, Biggar's (2011) call for pastors and theologians to be generalists is timely. According to Hainsworth and Paeth (2010: IX), the demand for the public *faiifeau* resonates with what a public theology is, 'as Christians are in the world, so must the church be, and thus the church must have a public theology.' The call for a public *faiifeau* is in line with what Kim and Day (2017) believe a public theology ought to do: to encourage open inquiry and critical debate for the common good of society. Samoa and its political, religious and cultural leaders must be open to the reality that Samoa's foundations have shifted with time and have become fractured. To restore the fractured foundations and achieve the common good for all Samoans, the leaders are required to speak out about issues including crimes to give-feet to Samoa and its future.

Samoans need to entertain the idea that the *faiifeau* is a public figure. He is the prophetic voice of God and is not restricted to a particular location and space. As the prophetic voice called to perform his duties according to the will of God, it requires the *faiifeau* to step outside what is usual and normal to Samoans. The benefits that will come from having the *faiifeau* perform a public role are immense. On the one hand, advocating for change by holding political, religious and cultural leaders accountable to their roles, involves a pitch to prevent the causes of many social problems in Samoa, including crime. On the other hand, the *faiifeau* becomes the voice of the voiceless of Samoan society, including victims of crimes, seeking justice for crimes committed against them.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, public theology is seldom heard of in Samoa, but it is a discipline and practice that can give-feet to addressing social issues, including crime in Samoa. Public theology can do this by doing theology in the public sphere. Utilising the



recommendations by Forsyth et al. (2020), on what a Pacific criminology approach could entail, this article has utilised the Samoan cultural practice or concept of building a traditional Samoan foundation, *fa'avae*, as a theory to explain the causes of crime and as a way forward towards crime prevention in Samoa, one applicable for the 'South' Pacific. Here, I put forward the idea of a public church minister, *faiifeau* who is a generalist. This means they need to be seen and heard in public, advocating ways to help address social issues in Samoa, including crime. Their new pulpit is the public space where they perform their roles as prophetic voices for the voiceless. Their new congregation consists of the stakeholders engaged in deliberation on how to effectively address the issues affecting Samoa. The ability of *faiifeaus* to leave their usual structured ways of performing their duties and take up a lesser-known way forward is not only possible by becoming mobile, flexible, and agile public clergies, theologians and *faiifeaus* but is vital as a crime prevention strategy for Samoa and the Pacific region.

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<sup>1</sup> Supreme Court of Samoa papers *Reupena v Senara*, WSSC 53 (2015), 4. Also see Amosa, *Courting a public theology*, 2020, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Reupena v Senara*, WSSC 53 (2016), p.7. See also *Reupena v Senara* 2017, p.7

<sup>3</sup> *Reupena v Senara*, WSSC 53 (2015), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Reupena v Senara*, WSSC 53 (2015), p.12.

<sup>5</sup> Samoa Observer, <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/editorial/102866>

<sup>6</sup> Samoa Observer, <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/29213>

<sup>7</sup> Samoa Observer, <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/57657>

<sup>8</sup> Samoa Observer, [https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/street\\_talk/57975](https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/street_talk/57975)

<sup>9</sup> Samoa Observer, <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/25171>

<sup>10</sup> Samoa Observer, <https://www.samoaoobserver.ws/category/samoa/49645>

<sup>11</sup> The word also means multilingual indicating a vast of different languages and cultures within a society or context.

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