

Education and Culture in Post-colonial Sāmoa.

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Abstract

This paper examines the history of 'Western' education in Sāmoa in relation to Sāmoan culture, and in the context of post-colonial theoretical perspectives, and in particular, notions of 'hybridity' and 'mimicry'. Sāmoan hybridity was created from a mixture of early 19th century versions of Christian theology with older social ideology leading to new justifications of hierarchical power, transformed modes of clothing and housing, expurgated versions of traditional practices, resonant urban memes from abroad, aspirational education systems based on learning from foreign books and student-centred pedagogy, and now, new streams of information and inspiration from social media. In the 1990s neoliberal educational reforms gave all Sāmoans access to secondary education intended to develop the nation's 'human resources', albeit with inadequate resources and problematic consequences for accelerated divisions of social class and rural and urban locations. We consider these issues in relation to multiple post-colonial Sāmoan identities and contested spaces in educational policy and curriculum and Sāmoan cultural values.

Keywords: Postcolonialism, Hybridity, Education, Sāmoa

Introduction

This paper examines the history of Western education in Sāmoa in relation to Sāmoan culture in the context of post-colonial theoretical perspectives. As summarised by Hickling-Hudson, Matthews and Woods (2004), post-colonialism draws on the ideas of Gayatri Spivak (2003), Homi Bhabha (1994), Frantz Fanon (1967) and Edward Said (1978) on the ways in which colonizing powers assimilate subaltern native elites to their hegemonic ideology. From this perspective, education is a means of ideological conquest to reinforce the power of the colonists. However, in the post-colonial era there is a space for the formerly colonized to reorganise and reclaim their cultural, educational and political values, allowing them readjust and to rectify foreign cultural, social and education interpretations instilled by Western colonizers. Homi Bhabha's notion of 'hybridity' is the emergence of a post-colonial culture drawn from multiple sources imbued with mimetic representations. Hybridity describes the mixture of two or more cultures in a singular place; to develop a new life that inherits both characteristics to produce something entirely different. For Bhabha, the mimicry of the colonialists by the colonised inspired ambivalence on both sides; the rulers scornful of native appropriations, the natives hopeful of converting acquired ideas and practices into power.

As we shall show, Sāmoan hybridity was created from a mixture of early 19th century versions of Christian theology leading to new justifications of hierarchical power, transformed modes of clothing and housing, expurgated versions of traditional practices, resonant urban memes from abroad, aspirational education systems based on learning from foreign books, and now, new streams of information and inspiration from social media. Our question is whether this hybridizing space became one of agency; refurbishing Sāmoan values and reclaiming Sāmoan social, cultural, education

and economic organisation and practices. For, as Ghandi (1998: 21) wrote 'we want the English rule without the Englishman. You want the tiger's nature but not the tiger ... the only way forward, accordingly, is to render the tiger undesirable'. Thus one of the most pointed insults in the Sāmoan language is to call a person 'fia palagi' (someone who mimicks Europeans). We will argue that within the hybridizing space, all Western borrowings become Sāmoan. Furthermore, the mixing of the Sāmoan cultural values, customs, and language, with incoming influences has been selective.

Sāmoan culture in its flexibility and malleability has been continuously reshaped in the colonial and postcolonial eras; yet in recent years the promotion of certain values by the United Nations and other international agencies has been widely resisted by Sāmoa's elite. For example the concepts of 'human rights', 'children's rights', 'women's rights' have been opposed by authority figures because they are perceived to undermine Sāmoan cultural values that require submissive obedience to parents, teachers, chiefs (matai) and ministers of religion (faifeau), and which reinforce a hierarchy of communal rights and obligations. Thus notions of student-centred pedagogy are resisted because are perceived as Western ideology, allowing children to speak out of turn and encouraging to them to question the teacher in the classroom. This is unacceptable to most Sāmoans (Tuia 2013), although there has been persistent efforts by external aid-funded advisers to refocus teaching methods on these purportedly more progressive and efficacious learning approaches, despite their challenge to Sāmoan culture. We suggest that older, long-established pedagogies Sāmoan pastor schools (A'oga a le Faifeau) arising from hybrid missionary and Sāmoan values could be revisited in training Sāmoa's teachers and organising its schools.

'Western' Education in Sāmoa since the 1850s

Sāmoan resistance to liberal western ideology is linked to the way in which foreign knowledge has been assimilated over the past 200 years. Nineteenth century English models of education were introduced to Sāmoa by the first Christian mission; the London Missionary Society (LMS), which was supported mainly by the non-conformist Congregational church in England. In 1834 the first simple reading books in the Sāmoan language were produced for teaching of reading and writing. The first schools were established in 1836 by English missionaries for those seeking baptism. As early as 1837, sixteen Sāmoans were employed by the mission to teach literacy and Christian principles. By the 1850s the Church had consolidated its presence sufficiently to open village schools. When translation of the Bible was completed in 1855 the mission began to promote mass literacy in the Sāmoan Language, along with elementary numeracy, so that people could read the Bible (Faletose 1959 cited by Tanielu 2004 and Tupolo-Tuaanae 2014). These schools placed great emphasis on memorisation by observation, copying, chanting and rote-learning which may have been a missionary technique but was well suited to Sāmoan ideas about the acquisition of knowledge (Tanielu 2004).

Education was the main tool of the Missionaries to bring about a religious and a cultural revolution in Sāmoa, working through villages whose organising principles had

gradually been modified by Christian teaching (Meleisea 1987). By 1900, when Germany annexed the western islands of Sāmoa, most of the people of Sāmoa were literate in their own language. Under German rule education was left to the churches and a few other private providers. New Zealand ruled Sāmoa initially under a military administration that replaced Germany in 1914, and later established a civil administration under a League of Nations mandate in 1921, then under a United Nations Trusteeship in 1949. Before Sāmoa became an independent state in 1962 the majority of Sāmoans had only received education in village 'pastor' schools.

The first efforts to establish a nation-wide government education system were made in the 1950s. Before this time, Government schools in the town of Apia were reserved for the children of foreign residents and part-Sāmoans; similarly the Roman Catholic church operated small number of colleges, mainly for part-Sāmoans. A teachers college was established and government schools were set up for groups of villages under an arrangement by which the government supplied the teachers, while the villages supplied housing and food for the teachers under leadership from village councils. By the 1960s there was vigorous competition between villages to attract effective teachers—their effectiveness was measured by the number of children who qualified to enter selective English language junior and senior secondary colleges teaching the New Zealand school curriculum. The mainstream Congregational, Methodist and Mormon churches also established secondary colleges in the 1960s. During these transformative years, Sāmoans placed high value on what they perceived as the papalagi (European) education system (Boon et al 2006). Seeking to rival the higher status Europeans and part-Europeans in the colonial pecking order, educational achievement and proficiency in the English language became highly prized. Sāmoan parents urged their children to do well, which they saw as a means to a better future as well as a blessing to the whole family (Tuia 2013).

Along with the revolution in education in the 1960s came mass migration, mainly to New Zealand but with smaller numbers moving to the United States via family connections in American Sāmoa. Today there are more people of Sāmoan ethnicity living overseas than there are in Sāmoa, and the Sāmoan economy relies on their remittances to maintain its economy. With these social and economic influences in post-colonial Sāmoa, there was increasing adoption of Western lifestyles. European-style houses raised the status of village families, so migrants sent money home to build these kinds of houses for their parents. Village prestige was raised when modern school buildings were constructed. There were new social influences. In traditionally-oriented Sāmoan families the role of children is to serve their elders, but today increasing numbers of ethnic Sāmoans are moving into the middle class, a status formerly occupied exclusively by part-Europeans. Nowadays middle class Sāmoan parents serve their children rather than the reverse; when they can afford it, they send them to private schools and pay for additional tutoring after schools.

Post-colonial Discourse

How does this brief summary of the history of education in Sāmoa sit within scholarly discourses on post-colonialism? This perspective emphasises the ways that Sāmoans were socially, culturally and educationally marginalized under colonial rule. This certainly occurred; the mixing of people and cultures was a source of violent conflict and civil wars in the 19th century (Gilson 1976; Meleisea 1987). The Sāmoans embraced Christian theology and mission schools, but resisted foreign interference in their affairs even after colonial rule was established. Under German rule 1900–14 there were a few years of peace, but Sāmoan leaders soon rebelled as they realised German ambitions to convert them into powerless peasants. The Germans responded by deporting these rebel chiefs. Peace continued under a relaxed New Zealand military administration from 1914–1920, but in native eyes New Zealand was discredited in 1918 for failing to quarantine Sāmoa from the 1918 influenza pandemic which killed one in five Sāmoans. When a New Zealand civil administration took over in 1921 in the ensuing decades Sāmoans rebelled again against repressive paternalistic interventions in their politics and economy (Meleisea 1987).

Sāmoans were more isolated from the outside world during the sixty-two restrictive years of colonial rule than they had been in the previous century, the ethnic Sāmoan majority (the ‘natives’) were forbidden to travel except in rare circumstances with colonial consent (Meleisea 1987). The post-colonial era was a time of opening up and moving out. From the late 1960s people left their villages in their thousands to work in New Zealand factories—willingly joining what is now New Zealand’s struggling, and to a great extent marginalised, Polynesian underclass. Are we to understand this transformative period as one driven by Sāmoan agency or by the forces of hegemonic, globalising capitalism?

The migration process globalised Sāmoa within 20 years. The course of globalisation has steered a small, resource-poor island nation from one where almost all of its people lived in subsistence and exchange based village economies into one with massive external dependence on aid, continuing emigration, remittances, and imported food and other goods. Sāmoa’s association with developed countries has increasingly been founded on hopes and expectations that they will infuse its economy with their money in the form of aid and investment. Yet there is ambivalence about external dependence, which is suggested by a renewed—and perhaps anxious—emphasis on Sāmoan identity (*fa’asinomaga*). This identity was less problematic in the past when the Sāmoan ‘us’ was contrasted with the colonial ‘them’, but today there are multiple Sāmoan identities among which one looks back to the precolonial era for inspiration, and one which is aspirant, urbanising, modernising and globalising. Sāmoa’s post-colonial 50 year past has been a time of recontextualising and restructuring of Sāmoan cultural values. Consequently, there are dilemmas for today’s education system. Today’s social and cultural values stem not only from Sāmoa’s colonial past that has slowly infiltrated socialisation, culture, education and political affairs, but also from

a feedback cycle of influence between Sāmoans in the diaspora and their families in Sāmoa.

Sāmoan Culture

What we know of Sāmoan culture before European contact was founded on its old religion in which the highest chiefs (ali'i) were distinguished by their divine genealogies, serving also as priests and mediums of their ancestor gods (Meleisea 1995). Sāmoan people spoke the same language and shared the same values and beliefs, but they were familiar with the Tongans with whom their highest chiefs often intermarried, and to some extent with other parts of the Polynesian island world. Education was based on observation, participation and the memorisation of oral literature such as legends and epic poems (solo), as well as genealogies and songs (Maiai 1957; Tuia 2013, 1999; Silipa 2004). Young men belonged to the aumaga society and learned the arts of war and craftsmanship; young women belonged to the aualuma society and learned decorative and practical textile arts (Maiai 1957). Sāmoan values were imparted to all; respect for the dignity of traditional institutions (mamalu and fa'aaloalo), for authority (fa'aaloali'i), for sacred relations (va tapuia), for respectful social distance (va fealoai), and for reciprocity (fetausia) (Tuia 2013: 9) which were to be demonstrated in everyday cultural and social activities. For those not possessed of divine ancestry, power was achieved by service (tautua) and, for some, gradual progression to leadership. During the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, these modes of learning persisted alongside a gradual process of Christian indoctrination which slowly eroded the traditional basis of chiefly rank and levelled old social hierarchies. As Meleisea points out (1995 and 1987), Christian ministers became the new sacred chiefs. But, left intact, was the respect for social order based on the authority of chiefs and church ministers and the expectation of submission to these authorities. When people speak of fa'aSāmoa (Sāmoan culture) today, they emphasise respect and obedience to parental and patriarchal authority. No wonder, therefore, that liberal 'Western' values are resisted as alien to Sāmoan culture.

Values of reciprocity have survived but are recontextualised. In the past these were practical as well as social; there was no money and food could not be stored, so was shared. The meaning, uses and size and texture of fine mats (ie toga) may have changed (Schoeffel 1999) but they are still the most symbolic of all gifts, nowadays functioning solely for that purpose, and indispensable at ceremonies. Now when a ceremonial gift (sua) is presented every culturally required article in the presentation can be replaced with a modern equivalent, but not the fine mat. It continues to serve the purpose of respect and honour as it did in the past. These ceremonial occasions marking funerals, the conferring of matai titles (saofai) and in some instances, weddings, are very expensive events compared to earlier times when money was not given as a gift, and all gifts were locally made or grown. However these ceremonies have the same social functions that they had in the past; showing respect to authority and bringing extended families together. Nowadays families typically assemble from several different countries for major ceremonies, particularly funerals (Lilomaiva-

Doktor 2016) reinforcing the transnational bonds among families. Sāmoan customs and cultural activities have changed, but as the Sāmoan saying goes ‘Tumau faavae ae sui faiga’—practices change but the foundation remains (Tuia 2013; Va’a 2006) referring to the belief among many Sāmoan that there is an enduring cultural logic, unchanged in the past two centuries.

Education for All

Hybridised Sāmoan cultural values shaped the education system in the post-colonial era (Tuia 2013; Afamasaga 2006). Most primary schools operate under the control of village councils of chiefs who appoint the school management committees. The Ministry of Education Sports and Culture (MESCC) appoints the teachers and because it rarely provides housing for primary or secondary teachers in rural areas, most live in villages under traditional village government. By the late 1980s, there were 21 government rural junior secondary schools under district management, and about 90 primary schools under village management. Four secondary schools (Sāmoa college, Avele, Vaipouli, and one other) and three primary schools (Leifiifi and the two Malifa schools) were fully funded by the government. There were also six secondary schools operated by churches. In the 1990s the government of Sāmoa abolished the old system of selective education based on an adaptation of the New Zealand school curriculum, whereby a relatively small number of children with the highest marks were admitted to secondary schools. Now there are district secondary colleges with classes up to Year 13 throughout Sāmoa, also mainly under the control of the village councils in each district; today most children attend school for ten years or more in proportions comparable to those in developed countries.

A key objective of the neoliberalist 1995–2005 Education Policy and Strategy was to give rural students the same access to education as those in town. By doing this, it was hoped that rural students would not only have equal access to senior secondary education, but there would be less overcrowding of urban schools. It was intended that all students everywhere in Sāmoa would have access, and thus the opportunity to have thirteen years of education in schools by qualified teachers using the English language for instruction, with comparable facilities and with a unified national school curriculum. This was to have included vocational subjects to be taught up to Year 13, as well as ‘academic’ subjects. The new policy drew on a 1992 World Bank study of Sāmoa’s education sector that declared Sāmoa’s human resource development was being held back because only a small proportion of secondary school graduates were being produced by the system who were eligible for employment or for postsecondary education and training. Under this neoliberal project the purpose of education was reformulated on the assumption that the goal of education was to produce workers—‘human resources’—for growing the economy.

These reforms have accelerated social class-based rural-urban divisions. A 2012 evaluation of the first Asian Development Bank loan to the education sector found that in rural areas there was a tendency for high status and well-off village residents (such as church ministers, small business proprietors) to send their children to schools in town,

because village or district schools local schools were perceived to be inferior to those in town. These students either commuted to school from their villages, or boarded with relatives in town. The main problem was that although there was no overall shortage of teachers, the rural secondary schools were short of qualified subject specialist teachers living within a reasonable commuting distance from the school, so many had not received specialized training in the subjects they were teaching (ADB 2011). Urban schools could more easily employ qualified teachers living in town or in peri-urban areas. Thus the growing divisions of social class have been facilitated by the inequality between rural and urban schools.

We do not propose to offer a detailed analysis of Sāmoa's secondary education system here, but draw attention to the fact that there are now 34 senior secondary schools: 25 government, 16 church, and 5 private, for a population of about 190, 000 people. Resources for secondary education services are spread very widely over a large number of schools, but they are also spread very thinly. Further, most of these schools do not produce students with sufficient knowledge or skills to win scholarships, qualify for university or obtain the kinds of employment that their parents had hoped for. They also point to fa'aSāmoa values that each village must have its own primary school, and each district and each church its own colleges (Afamasaga 2006). The state has limited authority over the fa'amatai system of local government, so when school fees were abolished by MESC in 2011 government schools moved increasingly into a legal limbo between community ownership and government control and questions of who should pay to maintain and equip schools. Village-appointed school committee members are mainly older men, who tend to have limited experience in or knowledge about education, especially secondary education. They usually expect some remuneration for attending meetings as well as income to pay for the maintenance of school grounds. Therefore school committees merely changed the name of the fees: school fees became 'enrolment fees' and were still charged.

Culture and Education

As we have discussed previously Sāmoa's hybridised culture retains authoritarian and hierarchical values adopted from missionary teaching merged with older values that do sit easily with contemporary educational approaches such as this, for example:

In student-centered classrooms, students are directly involved and invested in the discovery of their own knowledge. Through collaboration and cooperation with others, students engage in experiential learning that is authentic, holistic, and challenging. Students are empowered to use prior knowledge to construct new learning. Through the development of the metacognitive process, students reflect on their thinking. Curriculum and assessment are centered on meaningful performances in real-world contexts. As a partner in learning, teachers intentionally create organized and cohesive experiences to assist students to make connections to key concepts (Ralis 1995).

UNESCO (2004, p. 231) advises that:

...in many countries, present styles and methods of teaching are not serving children well. Pedagogy needs to respond to cultural and classroom contexts. Structured approaches to teaching, ... are not at odds with a child-friendly learning environment. Where such approaches are introduced, reforms to teacher training and school management will usually be required.

According to UNESCO (2011: 1) “The vision of [Sāmoa’s] Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture for the period 2006–2015 is a holistic education system that recognizes and realizes the spiritual, cultural, intellectual and physical potential of all participants, enabling them to make fulfilling life choices”. This vision statement sits well with the global ideals of education cited above, but could raise uncomfortable questions. Could these not also be seen in postcolonial contexts as arising from internationally promoted globalising, homogenising, democratising cultural ideals that do not sit well with fa’aSāmoa? Is it not the case that indigenous values are praised when they can be demonstrated to conform to these globalised ideals, and problematised when they do not? Would a child-friendly learning environment produce children who would feel comfortable in a cultural environment where children are expected to be self-effacing and to accept authority unquestioningly? Such values may be dissonant with liberal modernity, but they have survived for generations because they function for community cohesion.

The global agenda aims to ensure that developing countries like Sāmoa have education systems that serve the interests and needs of the people. However, the change in the education systems in former colonized nations are part of a rapid flow of global changes and influences which do not always allow deliberation over new approaches to education introduced by aid donors and international advisory agencies such as UNESCO. Passive resistance to new educational philosophies may be encountered if they are not owned by those who are expected to benefit from them. There is an unspoken condition that underlies offers of aid and technical assistance from international agencies and donor countries that their educational philosophies and approaches are inherently superior so should be adopted without question. As we have pointed out, one of the features of postcolonial Sāmoa is the emerging class system—middle-class Sāmoan parents have no problem with these globally advocated approaches and will, if they can afford to, send their children to private schools where such pedagogies are practiced. However, around 60 percent of Sāmoan households are in villages where student-centred approaches are at variance with community values that explicitly reject individualism as foreign (palagi) (SBS 2009: 23).

Are there more culturally acceptable and effective Sāmoan approaches to learning? Tanielu thinks that there are. She points out that the long-established Sāmoan pastor schools (A’oga a le Faifeau) not only fostered the maintenance and retention of the Sāmoan language, but utilised a competency-based form of assessment in which each child had to acquire the expected competency before he or she could be promoted to the next class. (Tanielu 2004: 220). Similarly, Tupolo-Tauaanae (2014) interviewed

adults who had attended A'oga a le Faifeau as children and who emphasised the benefits of the pedagogical methods that were used to develop oral and aural and memory skills of the students. However, it should be born in mind that these schools only had three grades, and since those days little has been written in the Sāmoan language for children to develop their ability to read, or interest in reading.

Conclusion

Since the 1960s the educational aspirations of most Sāmoan have been to harness what they perceive to be the empowering outcomes of 'Western' education for their children. Increasingly those Sāmoans who continue to live in traditional ways are perceived to be 'the poor' (see Escobar 1994). But at the same time there are on-going fears that Sāmoan language, cultural values and customary ways are slowly slipping away. For this reason educational policy and curriculum has been a contested space since the 1970s; can Sāmoans have 'Western' education without losing their identity? Can Sāmoan social and cultural values be reconciled with contemporary quests for knowledge and ways of being that can be converted into social status and wealth? Many Sāmoans assume that local cultural values do govern and guide Sāmoan's education system (Iyer and Tuia 2015; Tuia 2013) but since the 1990s it has been mainly driven, albeit not very successfully, by a utilitarian neoliberal agenda aiming to shape children into individuals, as 'human resources' for economic development, rather than as junior members of a hierarchical kin-based collective. The ambivalence reflects Bhabha's (1994) notion of mimicry in which the imitation of the dominant group is imperfectly comprehended and misinterpreted. Tibile (2012: 17) suggests that Bhabha's notion of mimicry is based on ambivalence, exaggeration, anxiety, and repetition with a difference, which surely reflects the situation in Sāmoa. Our education system imperfectly and partially aims to encourage upward mobility, changing values and beliefs only to the extent that there is an uncomfortable space between Sāmoan values and those of neoliberal modernity. This divide is most often reflected in the way Sāmoans love to mock pretension, for example in jokes about the imperfect English spoken by most of our people, as in Bhabha's discussion of the comic approach in discourses that mocks and undermine the efforts to become one of the dominant 'other' (1994: 86). While Sāmoans express their post-colonial cultural identity in dress and adornment (matai, faalavelave, tatau and malu, lavalava, elei ula's and sei) we hesitate to confront the dilemma of how to make education Sāmoan.

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