

Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, University staff, guests, and fellow graduates.

My dissertation explored the various themes of the book of Ecclesiastes from a diasporic Australian-Samoan perspective, through a methodology that utilised recent scholarship in diaspora studies and the Samoan proverb “Maota Tau Ave” (The House that is carried). For Samoans living in diaspora, they are mandated to carry their maota (house) to new lands, but as is the case with diasporic Samoans, there is a struggle to adhere to our culture and traditions while living in a foreign context. Consequently, attitudes of scepticism and pessimism emerge from Samoans in diaspora towards the practice of traditional culture and religion on foreign lands. From this standpoint, I sought to re-envisage the scepticism in Ecclesiastes, especially by the author Qohelet, as that of a Jewish sage in the diaspora.

This research provided great opportunities and changed my life. Whether it was the fruitful conversations with my supervisors Mark and Jione, or the ability to cross into unknown waters through research. Perhaps the greatest change in my life, was how this research expanded my horizon to be open to things that I probably would not have given a second thought. For instance, I was convinced that Ecclesiastes was part of a tradition known as wisdom literature, now I find that Ecclesiastes is part of something greater – not so much a tradition, but a conversation or as we call it in Pasifika: talanoa! Rather than belonging to a series of three other books – with Job and Proverbs – Ecclesiastes is just one of many talanoa partners sitting around the tanoa (kava bowl) – the Hebrew Bible: poking, nudging, mocking, lamenting, pushing at, pulling back, critiquing, judging, rejecting, welcoming its other talanoa partners of the Hebrew Bible.

Where might this research take me in the future? Talanoa has been defined in many ways around Pasifika, and often I am guilty of privileging my Samoan understanding. But perhaps this explanation by a friend from the Solomon Islands is apt: To him, tala-noa means to untie knots, as tala means ‘to open or untie’ and the word ‘noa’ means ‘knot.’ Reading the Bible can be somewhat full of knots, as a result of traditional readings of the text which only seek to maintain the status quo. But when hard questions are asked, and social and climate justice are at risk of being compromised, these traditional and colonial readings leave the Bible as a tight knot that is hard to untie. Accordingly, the hard questions are left unanswered, and social and climate justice is jeopardised. In the future, I hope this research pushes me to use talanoa as a way of paddling the Moana for more Pasifika readings of the text, to open up scripture and untie the knots in pursuit of responses to the hard questions – to deconstruct and decolonise the theological landscape in Samoa and Pasifika in light of social and climate justice.

Thank you.

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