

***Fa'aSamoa: a look at the evolution  
of the fa'aSamoa in Christchurch***

**A thesis**

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By  
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## DEDICATION

*This thesis is in Loving Memory of my grandparents:*

*Siauane Fa'amatuainu Suifua  
Sulesa Fa'amatuainu*

*Malagaitutauati Mose Mekuri  
Vaofua Alaoiasa Tatupu I*

*Whose spirit and journey still lives on through me, and*

*For my parents:*

*Fa'amatuainu Laneselota Siauane  
Lona Malagaitutauati Fa'amatuainu*

*Whose commitment to the fa'aSamoa is the inspiration for this thesis*

*&*

*for my sister Vaofua*

*Who embodies ava, alofa and fa'aaloalo*

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*Mitamita fai ae le agaga. Ona ole pule alofa ale Atua. Ua ia foai mai ai se taeao laulelei tatou te feiloai aae ile soifua ma le ola lelei*

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## ABSTRACT

What is the *fa'aSamoa*? Is it fair to just say the “Samoa Way”? This study aims to define and determine the significance of such an all-encompassing concept. The objectives of this investigation is to illustrate the evolution of the *fa'aSamoa*, from its “classical” model to a “variant” model practiced among the Samoa Christchurch community; yet, still be classified as the *fa'aSamoa*.

This investigation aims to look at the institutions of the *fa'aSamoa* to highlight how change within the Samoa community is not only from “external” forces but also change has occurred from within the Samoa community. One of the objectives of this thesis is to highlight the different groups within the Samoa community, who have different needs from that of other members in the community.

The transportation of the *fa'aSamoa* successfully to these shores has brought about an element of “togetherness” among the Samoa communities. Furthermore, the *fa'aSamoa* has evolved from the “Samoa Way” to a concept of traditions.

## Glossary

<i>Afakasi descent</i>	<i>Half caste, usually Samoan and European</i>
<i>Aiga</i>	<i>Family</i>
<i>Aiga Atoa</i>	<i>Family members situated in one village</i>
<i>Aiga Potopoto</i>	<i>Extended family</i>
<i>Aitu</i>	<i>Demon(s)</i>
<i>Ali'i</i>	<i>Matai (sacred)</i>
<i>Alofa</i>	<i>Love</i>
<i>Aso malamalama</i>	<i>spiritual enlightenment</i>
<i>Aso pouliuli</i>	<i>spiritual darkness</i>
<i>Aukilani</i>	<i>Aukilani</i>
<i>Auluma village</i>	<i>Group consisting of the daughters of the</i>
<i>Au toeina</i>	<i>Committee of Elders of the Samoan Congregational Church</i>
<i>Autalavou</i>	<i>Youth Group(s)</i>
<i>Ava</i>	<i>Kava, ceremonial beverage; Respect</i>
<i>Emanuelu</i>	<i>Christian sects – polite address</i>
<i>Fa'aaloalo</i>	<i>Respect, to be humble, reverence</i>
<i>Fa'aAukilani</i>	<i>the "Auckland way"</i>
<i>Fa'alavelave</i>	<i>Occasion such as a wedding or funeral, when family assistance should be given, in form of labour or goods</i>
<i>Fa'alupega</i>	<i>Formal set of official greetings</i>
<i>Fa'amatai</i>	<i>Matai system – social organisation of Samoan society.</i>

<i>Fa'a Nui Sila</i>	<i>the “New Zealand” way</i>
<i>Fa'a Samoa Samoan</i>	<i>“Way of life”, Samoan way according to Custom</i>
<i>Fa'atau</i>	<i>Debate – normally occurs among matai</i>
<i>Faifeau</i>	<i>Minister/pastor</i>
<i>Fasi</i>	<i>to beat/to fight</i>
<i>Feagaiga</i>	<i>Covenant between minister and congregation</i>
<i>Fia palagi</i>	<i>To be/ to act as a European</i>
<i>Fono</i>	<i>Meeting</i>
<i>Fono matai/fono ole nu'u</i>	<i>Village council</i>
<i>Fono tele`</i>	<i>National meeting consisting of faife'au and au toaina</i>
<i>Faufulega</i>	<i>Official opening of a Church</i>
<i>ie toga</i>	<i>Finely woven mat of pandanus fibres, usually called ‘fine mats’ in English, although they are not mats. Used in social occasions.</i>
<i>Inoino</i>	<i>to be disgusted</i>
<i>Ipu</i>	<i>Formal name for ‘cup’ in context of ‘seat’</i>
<i>Lafoga designated</i>	<i>Donation to the church/fa'alavelave or or assigned amount</i>
<i>Lotu</i>	<i>Church – au lotu - Churches</i>
<i>Ma</i>	<i>to feel/or be shamed/ embarrassed</i>
<i>Malae</i>	<i>Sacred ground found in all Samoan villages which all formal ceremonies are conducted</i>
<i>Malaga</i>	<i>Visiting Party</i>
<i>Masiga</i>	<i>month</i>
<i>Matafale</i>	<i>A household/or family namely within the Lotu</i>

<i>Mataga</i>	<i>shameful/embarrassment</i>
<i>Matai</i> ( <i>orator</i> )	<i>Titled person, either an Ali'i or Tulafale</i>
<i>Mealofa</i>	<i>Gift</i>
<i>Mesa</i>	<i>conflict/argument</i>
<i>Nafanua</i>	<i>Samoan Goddess of War</i>
<i>Nu'u</i>	<i>Village</i>
<i>Papalagi</i>	<i>“Sky bursters” refers to Europeans</i>
<i>Patele</i> <i>the</i>	<i>Honourable address of the Father/Brother of</i> <i>Roman Catholic Church</i>
<i>Pule</i>	<i>Authority/ secular authority</i>
<i>Sala</i>	<i>Sanction</i>
<i>Saofai</i>	<i>Formal ceremony of the bestowment of matai</i> <i>title</i>
<i>Si'i</i>	<i>the act of presenting a formal gift</i>
<i>Taeao</i>	<i>Dawn</i>
<i>Taule'ale'a</i>	<i>Untitled person/youth</i>
<i>Tautua</i>	<i>service, usually refers to one's aiga, matai or</i> <i>lotu.</i>
<i>Tiakono</i>	<i>Deacon/Elder</i>

<i>Tofiga</i>	<i>Historical event – namely 4 events of Samoan History</i>
<i>Tulafale</i>	<i>Type of matai – orator</i>
<i>Umu</i>	<i>Underground “oven”</i>
<i>Va</i>	<i>an acknowledged “space” or “gap” that recognises the relationship between individuals and others</i>

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## INTRODUCTION

What is *fa'aSamoa*? The prime objective of this study is to define this all encompassing and complex term such as *fa'aSamoa*. This study will also look at how *fa'aSamoa* has been adapted and changed over time in a new migrant enclave such as Christchurch, New Zealand. The concept of *fa'aSamoa* is normally interpreted simply as the 'Samoan way' that is in keeping with and accordance to Samoan customs and traditions. Although this may be an accurate gloss of *fa'aSamoa*, it presents *fa'aSamoa* as a concept that is concrete and rigid, which can be misleading. One of the fundamental elements of *fa'aSamoa* is its fluidity. This fluidity enables *fa'aSamoa* to shift 'meaning' in different contexts. *Fa'aSamoa* is a concept that is deeply entrenched in language. Internal and external power struggles have shaped *fa'aSamoa*, which has not only endured the impact of Christian missions, the colonial regimes of Germany and New Zealand. Amidst the Samoan communities in the diaspora, variant models of *fa'aSamoa* have emerged, yet all claim to be based upon *fa'aSamoa*.

This thesis examines what is meant by the *fa'aSamoa* in twenty-first century Christchurch. It aims to show how the *fa'aSamoa* may have altered in structure and function from its 'classical' interpretation within its Christchurch setting. Yet, the significance and symbolism of *fa'aSamoa* have remained the same. The Samoan community in Christchurch have not only maintained old mechanisms of the *fa'aSamoa* but have also implemented new approaches in practicing *fa'aSamoa* in the Christchurch environment. This thesis intends to

explore the differences and commonalities between Samoan born Samoans and New Zealand born Samoans, highlighting the diversity between these two groups. This is a crucial aspect of this study as both groups play a major role in the evolution, significance and future of the *fa'aSamoa*.

The findings of this study are crucial on both social and academic levels. It aims to provide the reader with a better understanding of how migrant communities, in this case the Samoan community in Christchurch, are able to adjust and adapt within host societies. Furthermore, the diversity among and within Samoan migrant communities can be illustrated by subtle differences between the Samoan communities in Christchurch and in Auckland. For instance, Macpherson (1997:93) notes another variant of the *fa'aSamoa* to emerge, is what referred to as the *fa'aAukilani*. This suggests that there is now an 'Auckland' way of *fa'aSamoa*. Although the Auckland Samoans may have not intended for the term to be of a separatist nature, the term *fa'aAukilani* has implied this. The emergence of a *fa'aAukilani* reflects the mature development and sheer number of the Samoan community residing in Auckland that it is able to differentiate itself from other Samoan communities. No such concept has emerged within the Samoan community in Christchurch.

The Samoan community in Christchurch is small in comparison to its northern counterpart. Despite their low numbers, the Samoan community in Christchurch is still a mature community, as Samoan migrants started settling in Christchurch as early as the 1950s. The Samoan community in Christchurch is viewed by other Samoan communities in New Zealand as being very '*palagi*-fied'

(‘Europeanised’); however, despite the differences in perspectives between the regions all Samoan communities adhere to and recognise the fundamentals of the *fa’aSamoa*.

This dichotomy underpins the prime objective of this study. While the focus is primarily on the Christchurch Samoan community, this thesis aims to provide a better understanding of the *fa’aSamoa* and of the Samoan people and communities living in New Zealand.

## OUTLINE

The outline of this investigation is arranged chronologically and is divided into two parts. Part I concentrates on defining what is meant by the *fa’aSamoa*. The objective is to define and present a ‘classical’ model of the *fa’aSamoa*. This will focus on the origins of the *fa’aSamoa* from its mythical past will provide the foundation of this investigation.

Chapter One will provide a ‘picture’ of a pre-European Samoa, and will depict the foundation of the *fa’aSamoa* in its purest ‘classical’ form. This will provide a ‘Samoan perspective’ regarding the source of their existence and their cosmic, philosophical and ideological perspectives. It is within Samoa’s mythical past that one is able to uncover not only what lies at the heart of the *fa’aSamoa* but also determines *fa’aSamoa* is.

Part II concentrates specifically on the Samoan community in Christchurch and will examine how the concept of the *fa’aSamoa* has survived in its New Zealand setting. It highlights the ‘external influences’ and ‘internal

clashes' that have added to the various interpretations of the *fa'aSamoa*, and have contributed to the bonding of all Samoans to a common identity. Being a minority group in New Zealand, the strengthening of identity has aided the survival of the Samoan culture. *Fa'aSamoa* plays an integral role in the lives of the Samoans here and abroad, as well as individually and collectively in Christchurch.

The preamble to Part II outlines the motives that contributed to the decisions of many Samoans choosing to come to New Zealand. Furthermore, it uncovers the motives behind the New Zealand government's decision to accept large number of Samoan migrants and describes the reception Samoan migrants received upon arrival. To fulfil the objectives of this investigation and illustrate the evolution of the *fa'aSamoa*, the institutions of the *fa'aSamoa* are examined such as the *aiga* (family), *matai* (chiefs and orators), and the *Lotu* (church).

Chapter Two looks at the significance and structure of the *aiga*. It emphasises the 'external' influences that have challenged the traditional modes and functions of the *aiga*. It will also highlight the strategies employed by Samoans in coping with an alien environment, while attempting to maintain the *fa'aSamoa*. In examining these strategies, this study will explore how traditional ideologies in a new environment have contributed to the diversity and disparity among the Samoans themselves.

Chapter Three looks at the institution of the *matai*. It identifies the significance and function of the *matai* and how the *fa'amatai* (*matai* system) is practiced in the Christchurch community. It outlines the origins and the significance of the *matai* and its integral role in the context of the *fa'aSamoa*. It

will also illustrate how Western ideologies and structures have impinged and affected the *matai*'s role. Furthermore, this has had a significant influence on the Samoans and their perception of the role of *matai* in the Samoan community in Christchurch.

Chapter Four addresses the significance and function of the institution of *Lotu* (Church) among the Christchurch Samoan community as a pivotal force in their practice of *fa'aSamoa*. In its new setting the Church has become a safe haven for many Samoans where religious, traditional social and community activities take place. However, the Church has also become a catalyst for dissent among Samoans in their attitude towards and perception of the *fa'aSamoa*. Opposition towards the church is not based on religious grounds but on the church's traditional role, privilege and position in Samoan society. Moreover, the pressure and obligation of many Samoans to perform their 'duty' to the church has become increasingly criticised by a younger generation. This chapter also examines the significance and the role of the *faiifeau* (minister/pastor). It will explore how the minister's role has changed and influenced the parishioners' attitudes towards the minister and acceptance of 'traditional' obligations towards the church and the *faiifeau*. This is an important aspect because the church has provided the Samoan community with a platform to voice concerns on secular issues, in the wider community. It is these conflicting attitudes towards the church and in particular the role of the ministers that have contributed to the diversity amidst the Samoan community in Christchurch.

Finally, Chapter Five summarises the evolution of the *fa'aSamoa* from its 'classical' model to a variant model among the Samoans in the Christchurch setting. Furthermore, this chapter attempts to advocate the need for further research in exploring, examining and implementing strategies to retain Samoan customs, traditions, heritage and identity, essentially the *fa'aSamoa*.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on the Samoan Islands and on the Samoans themselves is not only vast and diverse but is at times controversial too. Evaluating the available literature highlights two important factors, firstly, the literature, especially the early accounts must not only be viewed as the 'sources' but also that it must be considered in light of the authors' own agenda, worldview and the period time that they are writing in. Secondly, the literature on Samoa and on the Samoan people illustrates how the 'sources' have become part of the evolutionary process of the *fa'aSamoa*.

Much of the early literature on the Samoans and Samoan Islands rely heavily on sources from the accounts of Christian missionaries such as John Williams's journals (1842), Fraser (1842), Stair (1847), Turner (1841/1846); and ethnographers such as Augustine Kramer (1846/1842); Samoan oral histories and folklores; as well as official mission and German and New Zealand administration manuscripts. The data from these early sources are crucial but must also be viewed as a reflection of the attitude of the 'Christian missions' and the 'agenda' of the authors. For instance, Reverend Powell's account of the *Origins of Samoa*

is compatible with the Book of Genesis. Powell's account projects a very Biblical interpretation, which reflects the Christian missions' ultimate task in the Samoan Islands, to Christianise the Samoans.

The expansion and settlement of the Pacific region opened up a new area of research. By the end of the nineteenth century the waning influence of the missionaries and the emergence of 'modern' scholars saw a "more concerted and sophisticated way... techniques...of comparative linguistics and comparative mythology" employed (Howe 2003:42). Although the missionaries provided an extensive ethnography, their approach focused on making "Polynesian culture meaningful by interpreting it in terms of missionary understandings of human societies and history" (Ibid 2003: 50-52). The emergence of modern scholarship saw a change in attitude and aided the understanding of cultural and "social determinism," which allowed scholars to view indigenous cultures as "having the capacity to adapt and change things for themselves, rather than relying on outside influences" (Ibid 2003:50-52).

This 'socialising process' is illustrated in Kallen's *The Western Samoa Kinship Bridge* (1982), in which Kallen challenges how the *fa'aSamoa* is examined and defined. According to Kallen, to view the *fa'aSamoa* from a "traditional anthropological view" – the biocultural, territorial and social framework of *fa'aSamoa*, results in a limited understanding and a lack of appreciation of the *fa'aSamoa*. Kallen argues that the *fa'aSamoa* is "a total phenomenon...a world-view, a way of life, a cherished heritage...an ideological

underpinning for...ethnocultural identification...which allows flexibility and a 'distinctive' identity to emerge" (Kallen 1982: pp 25,34).

The majority of the early scholarship on Samoa and the Samoan people fall into two areas: the 'anthropological view' (Mead 1961; Goldman 1970) and the 'colonial impact.' Early studies such as Keesing (1934) *Modern Samoa its government and changing life* and Grattan (1948) *An introduction to Samoan custom* outline the affects of Western influences on the Samoan socio-economic and political structures. During the 1960s and thereafter, research on Samoa and the Samoan people not only continued exploring the impact of Western values on the socio-economic and political structures of Samoan society but it also looked at the 'Samoanisation' of Western ideals (Davidson 1967; Gilson 1970). Also within this period much of the literature centred on the colonial regimes of Germany (Hempenstall 1969; 1978) and New Zealand (Field 1984) as well as the Samoan response and resistance towards this (Hempenstall 1984). The impact of 'globalisation' on Samoan society and the influence of this phenomena on the principles of *fa'aSamoa* and the Samoan people is examined in depth by Shore (1982); Shankman (1983); Meleisea (1987b); Vaai (1999); Iati (1999). These studies provide a 'picture' of who the Samoan people are, and illustrate the Samoans playing an active part in their own history. It also illustrates how these new 'ideals' slowly became 'Samoanised' so that it is in accordance to *fa'aSamoa*. Although these studies highlight the evolution of the *fa'aSamoa* these studies portray the *fa'aSamoa*, simply as the 'Samoan way.'

Initially the emergence of Samoan scholars in academia focused on responding to the early sources. Samoan scholars such as Meleisea (1987a; 1987b; 1988); Wendt (1969); Pio (1992); Maiava (2001)) set about providing an ‘insider’ perspective. For example, Gunson (1978: 317) defines *fa’aSamoa* simply as the ‘Samoan way of life.’ This definition restricts *fa’aSamoa* within a rigid boundary that permits no innovation or flexibility. For many of the Samoan scholars, the need to provide readers with a more holistic depiction of how the *fa’aSamoa* is an integral state of being, is needed. For example, Meleisea (1987b: 16-17) defines *fa’aSamoa*, as a

*political and economic system...as a framework for action based upon the social structure of the aiga and the nu’u and the authority of matai and fono, new practices, ideas and goods could be accepted and incorporated into it so that either the system remained unchanged in its essentials, or else was not perceived to have changed fundamentally.*

Furthermore, challenges to *fa’aSamoa* have provided Samoans’ ‘reasons’ to resist and challenge the colonial regimes of Germany and New Zealand. As a result *fa’aSamoa* came to symbolise ‘resistance’ and ‘unity’ among the Samoans (Wendt 1969). As Meleisea (1987b:16) states,

*[the Samoans] believed their political and economic system clear in essentials and flexible in detail, not simply a reactionary nationalism, although it did develop a symbolic significance against colonisation.*

Samoan scholarship also focused on exposing the ‘realities’ of the *fa’aSamoa*. Scholars such as Albert Wendt who wrote *Sons for the return home* (1973), *Pouliuli* (1977), *Ola* (1991); and recently, Melani Anae’s (1998) PhD

thesis *Fofoa-i-vao-ese: the identity journeys of New Zealand born Samoans* describe the ‘realities’, ‘abuses’, and the pressure many Samoans feel in their efforts to adhere to *fa’aSamoa*. For instance, Anae (1998) highlights the ‘journey’ of many New Zealand born Samoans. She contends that many New Zealand born Samoans have had to construct their own identity in an effort to function and be accepted from Samoans and non-Samoans, in their new homeland. Tiatia (1998) also explores this by examining the advantages and disadvantages of living in two cultures.

A noticeable feature of the literature on Samoan communities in New Zealand is that prior to the 1970s, there is very little. One reason for this is that much of the literature on the Samoan community in New Zealand can be found grouped together with other Pacific peoples living in New Zealand. Therefore, much of the data on the Samoan people, in official summaries is in the context of ‘Pacific Islanders.’ An early source is Fairburn’s (1961) *Samoan Migration to New Zealand* in which Fairburn explores the motives behind the mass migration of Samoans to New Zealand shores. One of the first in-depth studies on the Samoan people in New Zealand is Pitt & Macpherson’s 1974 study, *Emerging Pluralisms: the Samoan community in New Zealand*. It focused on how the Samoan community transported adapted and maintained *fa’aSamoa* in its new setting. Although Pitt & Macpherson (1974) focus primarily on the Samoan community in Auckland and in the township of Tokeroa, its significance is still vital and relevant to this study. Finn’s (1973) study, *The Samoan community in Christchurch: a migration study* and Hamilton’s (1974) *The political integration*

*of Samoan immigrants in New Zealand* are the very few early pieces of scholarship that centred on the Samoan community in Christchurch. As the Samoan community in New Zealand increases, so too does the need for further research into this area.

The literature on the Samoan community in New Zealand is varied. It focuses on the social and political integration of the Samoan communities into mainstream, and on the efforts of the Samoan community to maintain the *fa'aSamoa*. For example, much of the literature focus on areas of employment (Larner 1989; Poot 1993; Bedford 2001; Macpherson 2001), racism (Spoonley & Macpherson 1996), the impact of mass migration on both Samoa (Shore 1982; Shankman 1983; Ahlburg 1991) and in New Zealand (Trlin & Spoonley 1992; Macpherson 1994; Macpherson *et al.* 2001; 2002; Anae 1995; 1998). Unfortunately, many of these studies focus on the larger populated Samoan communities in the northern cities. There is also an increasing number of studies that focus on providing a better understanding of the Samoan people in New Zealand (Nag Woo 1985) by examining the social structures such as the church (Noise 1978; Hendricks 1995; Pale Napa 1993; Titian 1998); and social issues (Arena 2001); education (Mamie 1999); and identity (Anae 1995; 1998). These studies examine how the Samoans have adapted and implemented new strategies in an effort to maintain and acknowledge *fa'aSamoa*, while living in New Zealand. However, such studies do not illustrate the diversity within the Samoan communities in New Zealand or in Christchurch. By focusing on the institutions of the *fa'aSamoa* – *aiga*, *matai* and *lout*, the differences and similarities within

Samoan communities itself will become more apparent. It is important to note here that while literature on chieftaincy in Samoa, and the Pacific (Goldman 1970; Gunson 1978; Noa 1999; Vaai 1999; White & Lindstrom 2002) may be vast, literature on chieftaincy in New Zealand is limited. Furthermore, there is limited research on how these institutions in *fa'aSamoa* such as *aiga*, *matai* and *lotu* have contributed to the development of Samoan communities in New Zealand.

As the numbers of Samoan people born in diaspora have increased, the need for more research is evident. Studies such as: McGrath's (1990) *Fa'aSamoa in Seattle*; and Spickard *et al.*(2001) *Pacific Diaspora* focus on the Samoan communities in the United States of America; and Va'a (2001) *Saili Matagi: Samoan migrants in Australia*, not only provides an insight into these Samoan communities but it also provides a comparative platform and highlights how "variant" models of *fa'aSamoa* emerges. To identify the significance and the role of *fa'aSamoa* is an important aspect in determining and implementing new strategies to ensure the survival of *fa'aSamoa* and the future development of the Samoan community in Christchurch.

## METHODOLOGY

This examination is arranged chronologically, in order to illustrate how the concept of *fa'aSamoa* has evolved from a 'classical' model to a 'variant' form amidst the Samoan community in Christchurch. It also seeks to provide a clearer picture of how *fa'aSamoa* and its practices, in this foreign environment have

shaped the Samoan community living in Christchurch. To do illustrate this, the thesis adopts several methodological approaches. The thesis is separated in two parts: Part I and Part II.

Part I examines the question ‘What is *fa’aSamoa*?’ This section relies heavily on literature from historical, linguistic, economic and anthropological frameworks. The main objective here is to establish the significance of *fa’aSamoa* and determine how the institutions of *fa’aSamoa* are utilised from the various approaches.

The advantage of utilising the literature from various methodological frameworks is twofold: first, one is able to identify how the literature highlights the significance of the *fa’aSamoa*. It is also able to show how this affects and manifests itself into Samoan society, both in the home islands and in the various Samoan enclaves abroad. Furthermore, it demonstrates how Samoa’s mythical past still plays an influential role within *fa’aSamoa*. This is relevant to the customs and traditions of *fa’aSamoa* practices of today. Second, the literature provides a fundamental basis and a useful tool during the interviewing process. By utilising the sources in this manner, one was able to construct a comparative perspective. The literature provided a point of reference, for the researcher to engage in issues that affected other Samoan communities as well as those participating in this study. For the participants of this study it provided information and an opportunity to discuss and explore their own perceptions of what *fa’aSamoa* means to them.

Part II of this investigation is based on data collated from prescribed interviews and discussion groups that took place. The majority of the prescribed interviews and the discussion groups took place during 2001 and 2002 and followed two models. The first model followed a structured and formal format with individual interviews whereas, the other model was conducted in a more informal and unstructured format. The second model consisted mainly of discussion groups: five groups of five people and one group consisting of four respondents.

The decision to utilise both models was to ensure all participants would feel comfortable and in a safe setting, particularly when discussing topics such as gender roles within family, the institutions of *fa'aSamoa*, *fa'alavelave* (familial obligations) and their own personal experiences with other Samoans and non Samoans. For instance, for many New Zealand born Samoans, the use of the group approach, where it was more informal and unstructured facilitated conversation and debate. It also provided a "safe" environment, especially for the male respondents who were able to express their own experiences and opinions freely. Moreover, as the researcher, the opportunities to ask questions of a sensitive nature was also observed and debated as a group rather than place an individual in an uncomfortable position. All the respondents that took part in the discussion groups were New Zealand born Samoans.

All the participants of this study were selected based on factors such as church affiliation, *matai* and non *matai*, formal schooling, and length of residency for the island born Samoans. The selection process aimed to include a wide and

diverse representation of the Samoan community in Christchurch, so that a 'realistic' picture of how *fa'aSamoa* is defined and how it is re-enacted within the Christchurch setting.

The interviewing process initially placed all participants in three groups according to age, church affiliation, chiefly status and place of birth:

- a) 20 – 29 years
- b) 30 – 44 years
- c) 45 years and over

Once the data was collated and analysed the participants were then divided into two groups, according to age. The reason for this was to show how 'external' forces and 'internal' clashes have impacted on as well as contributed to the evolution of *fa'aSamoa*. The two groups were divided into:

- a) Group A 35(+) over
- b) Group B 34(-) under

Group A consisted of 33 participants, 21 were Samoan born Samoans (SBS) and 11 participants were New Zealand born Samoans (NZB). Group B consisted of 29 participants, 12 participants were SBS and 17 were NZB Samoans. The majority of the NZB Samoan interviews from Group A and Group B adopted the 'forum' model, while all the interviews for the interviews of the SBS Samoans in both Group A and Group B followed the formal and structured format.

My position as the 'researcher' and a New Zealand born Samoan woman put me in a unique position as an 'outsider' as well as being an 'insider.' As a researcher, one is aware of the pitfalls of being in such a position and the need to

adopt a 'neutral' stand became paramount in my approach. However, as a member of the Samoan Christchurch community, one was able to access the wider Samoan community proved to be advantageous and a necessity in obtaining data for this study. It is important to note that a certain amount of 'cultural understanding' on the part of the researcher when sensitive issues were being discussed. This became apparent when the one conducted interviews with the majority of the Samoan born Samoan participants of this investigation, and the need to adopt an 'outsider' and 'insider' perspective. For instance, some of the older SBS participants in Group A preferred not elaborate too much on the 'functions' of the *faifeau* (minister). Incidentally, the majority of the SBS respondents in both Group A and Group B chose to respond simply with a 'yes' which normally meant, yes, 'I agree' or 'yes, you know' a technique many adopted so not to offend. By focusing on the institutions of *fa'aSamoa* many of the SBS participants in both Group A and Group B answered with reference to 'we' the Samoan community; however, when commenting on negative or 'abuses' of *fa'aSamoa* many of these SBS respondents preferred to answer from either personal experiences or how 'it' affected all Samoans in New Zealand. Many of the SBS participants in this examination as provided the appropriate *va* (the gap) between myself (the researcher and a New Zealand born Samoan woman) and them perceived my adoption of a 'neutral' stance.

As a New Zealand born Samoan woman, one's approach towards the New Zealand born Samoans was that of an 'insider.' My position as researcher did not inhibit discussion, instead conversation was allowed to flow. As a result, the

‘forum’ approach provided an appropriate environment for a discussion on issues such as acceptance, identity, culture, family commitments to flourish. For many of the NZB participants in both Group A and Group B the ‘forum’ model not only provided a ‘safe’ environment but also it facilitated discussion on issues such as the ‘pros and cons’ of the *matai*, and the *lotu*, and how many viewed ‘their place’ not only within the Samoan community but also within mainstream society.

The literary sources and the data collated in this research is utilised in an effort to provide and illustrate not only what is the concept of *fa’aSamoa* but also how *fa’aSamoa* functions among the Samoan community, in twenty first century Christchurch. The literary sources aim to provide not only a ‘picture’ of *fa’aSamoa* in its ‘classical’ form but it also aimed to provide a point of reference in the interviewing process. The data collected in this research intends to provide a ‘realistic’ picture of what the role, its dynamics, and the significance of *fa’aSamoa* is amidst the Christchurch Samoan community. Furthermore, on a higher level it intends to address the future of *fa’aSamoa* not only for the Samoan community living in Christchurch, but to all Samoan communities living in a modern age while trying to retain a past, living in diaspora.

## Chapter One: What is *fa'aSamoa*?

*Fa'aSamoa is likened to an immortal tree with roots that grows deep into the ancient world. Fa'aSamoa is watered by the rains, warmed by the sun, and shaped by the winds from the four corners of today's world. Its substance is changing, its philosophy has expanded and its practices have been enriched. In spite of these changes, fa'aSamoa, is Samoan...*

*(Ngan-Woo 1985: 11)*

### a) **Definitions of *fa'aSamoa***

The term *fa'aSamoa* elicits many interpretations from scholars and non-scholars, Samoans and non-Samoans alike. It has been described as the “Samoan way” or “to act according to Samoan custom” (Pratt 1984: 131). Although this definition may be ‘accurate,’ it does lack the emotional attachment and the essence of what the significance of *fa'aSamoa* holds and represents for many Samoans. The prefix *fa'a* is complicated, the main function of the prefix *fa'a* is a ‘causative’ prefix that is ‘to make,’ ‘to do,’ ‘or to be’ (Pratt 1984: 106). Pratt also states, that there are seven interpretations when this prefix is applied. For instance, it can signify divisions, such as *fa'alua-* to divide in halves (ibid: 106). Allardice (1985: 214) claims when the prefix *fa'a* is applied to a noun it may form a verb that can be interpreted as referring to or to show something ‘in the manner of’ or ‘an aspiration to something.’ In this context, *fa'aSamoa* can refer to as ‘the path’ toward something, rather than a fixed code or standard.

St. Christian (1994: 33) defines *fa'aSamoa* as a 'totalising code' that is sought after or pursued, rather adhered to or obeyed. St. Christian believes that *fa'aSamoa* is "a kind of short hand Samoans themselves use to indicate a wide range of things, from their perception of how their ancestors lived, to their persistent concern with propriety and truly the Samoan way of living (ibid: 33)." Although St. Christian's interpretation of *fa'aSamoa* as a totalising code suggests that *fa'aSamoa* is one-dimensional and it leaves no room for change or individuality. According to Apete Meredith, this provides a distorted perception of what *fa'aSamoa* stands for. Meredith insists, that *fa'aSamoa* should not be viewed as or limited to just the 'Samoan way' because *fa'aSamoa* is 'the WAY of life.' It consists of a process of internal living that allows Samoans to not only distinguish themselves from others but also allows Samoans to united and identified themselves, through one's *tu ma aga* (conduct and behaviour). *Fa'aSamoa* encompasses culture, tradition and one's history that is re-enacted through the ceremonial rituals and everyday practices of the Samoan people, but is also able to adapt accordingly (Meredith 14 April 2002). *Fa'aSamoa* is a 'system,' which stems from the family unit and is symbolised in the *fa'amatai* (*matai* system).<sup>1</sup> Moreover, *fa'aSamoa* is embedded into every the Samoan social, economic and political systems, and in Samoan everyday life, a 'way of life' (ibid, 14/4/2002).

Meleisea (1988: 21) describes *fa'aSamoa* as a 'socio-economic and political framework' based on the social structure of the *aiga* (family), the *nu'u*

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<sup>1</sup> *Fa'amatai* is the social, economic, political and cultural structure in each village, it sometimes referred to as the "matai system." I believe it is the visible and collective participation of each Samoan and the *fa'aSamoa* on a larger scale.

(village/polity) under the authority of the *matai* (chief) and *fono ole nu'u* (village council). Other scholars such as TuiAtua Tupua Tamasese<sup>2</sup> elaborate on the psychological and emotive significance of *fa'aSamoa* and argue that *fa'aSamoa* is,

*a body of custom and usage. It is a mental attitude to God, to fellow men and his surroundings. It is a distinctive lifestyle. It is not the physical make-up, the mood or passion of one man. It is a collection of spiritual and cultural values that motivates people... It is the heritage of people.*

(TuiAtua Tupua Tamasese cited in Field 1984: 20)

Tamasese illustrates how *fa'aSamoa* IS for many Samoans their identity. It possesses a set of guidelines that dictate how Samoans should conduct their 'way of life.' To confine *fa'aSamoa* to one interpretation is almost impossible. Although many scholars provide 'accurate' definitions of what *fa'aSamoa* is, it is dependent on and from their different perspectives. Therefore, it is imperative that one must view and understand *fa'aSamoa* as a '*concept of traditions.*'

Tradition, Lawson (1996:12) argues, is a concept linked closely with the ideals of culture and identity that not only define a certain group as a political entity, but also allows certain persons to claim certain privileges within a certain group. In this context, *fa'aSamoa* is cemented in Samoan folklore, legends, phrases and proverbs, and originated in Samoan mythology (Heslin 1995:53). For the Samoan people it contains an element of reality that the mind clings to and retains oracularly, "that their myths were to their own invention and resulted from their own experience" (ibid: 53). Therefore, the conception of *fa'aSamoa* in this

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<sup>2</sup> Formerly known as Tupuola Efi.

light and its explicit reference to a 'traditional' that not only covers the 'totality' of life that all Samoans have been accustomed to but it also is Samoan in nature and Samoan in character (ibid : 53). This provides a framework for social behaviour and conduct in Samoan society.

The Samoans' believed that because the *fa'aSamoa* originated from their mythical past the re-enactment of all Samoan customs and traditions not only maintained its reference within the Samoans' everyday lives but it also created a distinctive cultural identity that distinguished the Samoans from their neighbours. The Samoans possessed a distinctive feature that set them apart from other Pacific nations. Unlike other Pacific peoples who refer to in their folklore, songs and mythology to a mythical home – *Hawaikii* or *Pulotu*, the Samoans claimed that only did they originate in Samoa, but since creation, have lived and populated the Samoan Islands. The Samoans believe they descended from the gods and that their existence and *fa'aSamoa* emerged and evolved from the sacred centre (Fido 1995: 11). Unlike the Fijians and Tongans, the Samoans possessed a decentralised social and political structure but retained a unitary cultural entity, which encompassed the whole of the Samoan people. The Samoans possessed a unified language, the same social, economic, political structure and history. However, each village maintained autocratic authority, notably, through the institution and role of the *matai* and elements of status and rank. Although *matai* are the 'governing elites,' the Samoans did not establish an aristocracy like the Tongans and Hawaiians. This distinctive feature unified all Samoans under a decentralised system and distinguished the Samoans from its Pacific neighbours. To gain a

better understanding of *fa'aSamoa*, an exploration into Samoa's mythical origins is required.

## **b) Samoa's Origins**

“The Samoans originated in Samoa.” (Meleisea 1987a: 2) This remark embodies the attitude and beliefs many Samoans adhere to and defend. The Samoans' identity stems from this foundation. Samoans, like many Pacific peoples, have their own theories and myths of their ancestry that not only explain and verify their origins but also account for their existence in the world. It provides an explanation of how, why and when they came about to inhabit this world (Fraser 1892:164). Although many there exists various accounts within the literature regarding Samoa's origins, the importance as Meleisea (1987a: 31) points out is not that the stories differ but that these stories are recorded, and who is telling the story. In addition, the various interpretations allude to or may support territorial divisions within Samoa, and therefore, have an intricate role in Samoan culture and the political organisation. Fido (1995: 11-15) argues, that Samoan history is fundamentally founded on four historical events known as *tofiga (s)*. The first, the legacy of Tagaloalelagi; the second the legacy of Pili; the third is the legacy of Atiogie; and the fourth the legacy of Nafanua. All four *tofiga* are crucial and form the basis of Samoan heritage.

In all the accounts that explore Samoa's origin there is one constant factor: the almighty god – Tagaloalelagi – god of the heavens and the mightiest of them all. To illustrate this here are two different accounts of the origin of Samoa. First,

Reverend Thomas Powell's account of the *Origins of Samoa* followed by Reverend J Fraser's version. Powell's version starts with Tagaloalelagi/Tagaloa, the mighty god that made all things. It was his ordinance to the 'rock,' which stated:

*Be thou split up...Then was brought forth Papa-ta'oto (lying rock): after that, Papa-sosolo(creeping rock); then Papa-lau-a'au(reef rock), the Papa'-ano-ano (thick rock); then Papa'-ele(clay rock); then Papa-tu (standing Rock); then Papa'-amu(coral rock) and his children... (Powell cited in Meleisea 1987a: 2)*

Moreover, Tagaloalelagi not only created the heavens and the earth, but also in his 'immensity', he created Man and Woman,

*Tagaloa spoke again to the Rock, and the Sky was produced...then Lua-ao(two clouds), a boy came forth... and Lua-vai (water hole), a girl came forth...Tagaloa appointed these two to the Sa-tua-lagi (behind the sky)... the Tagaloa made an ordinance to the rock and said... Let the Spirit and the Heart and Will and Thought go on and join together inside the Man: and they joined together there Man became intelligent. And this was joined to the earth (ele'ele), and it was Fatu-ma-le'ele'ele (heart and the earth), as a couple, Fatu the man, and 'ele'ele, the woman... Tagaloa said to Tui-te'elage(sky proper), "Come here now, that you may prop up the sky"...But it fell down because he was not able for it. Then Tui-te'e-lage went to Masoa(starch) and Teve(a plant with very bitter roots): He brought them and used them as props; then he was able. (masoa and teve were the first plants that grew, and other plants came afterwards). Then Sky remained up above, but there was nothing for the sight to rest upon. There was only the far-reaching to Immensity and Space.*

(Powell cited in Meleisea 1987a:3)

Tagaloalelagi/Tagaloa created 'rock' in its many different variations, the sea, and fresh water, *Aoa-lala* (tree branch), man, woman, spirit, the Heart; then Will; then Thought. In Reverend John Fraser's account of *The Origins of Samoa*, there is a

similar account of Samoa's creation although Fraser's account is somewhat shorter and the order of events differs from Powell's version. For instance,

*After the heavens and earth are created Tangaloo places himself in the highest – nineth heaven-and dwells in his 'faleula', his palace of brightness. Afterwards Tangaloo wishes to rests and 'papa'-rock emerges and this is the physical origin of all things – then varieties of rock soon united to form 'Earth', then Sea – 'le tai' then 'le vai'-fresh water appears on Earth. Hitherto Earth and Sky were one, but Sky is lifted – the Man appears. But man is dull, inert mass of matter, so Tangaloo created Spirit, heart, will and thought and put within him and thus Man became a living soul.*

(Fraser 1892: 167,168)

Both versions present similar themes, Powell's version projects a very 'Biblical' approach, while Fraser's account comes across as an interpretation that have been translated from what he has been told. In spite of the variation in the spelling of Tagaloalelagi/Tangaloo/Tagaloo or the exact sequence of how 'creation' occurs and recorded, from a Samoan perspective the authenticity of the story is not the issue. The fundamental point is that Tagaloo is the 'almighty god' and from him the Samoan Islands emerge, and it is from him the founders of the most ancient human lineages is established. First, the 'primeval void' gives way to the natural phenomena, which in several generations produced Tagaloo and the forces, and materials with which he created Samoa and begat mankind (Kramer 1907 vol 1: 318ff; Gilson 1970: 40). For many Samoans, they did not come from a mythical home like other Pacific peoples, who have migrated from their homeland - *Hawaikii*, the golden land of the Polynesians, the Samoans originated in Samoa.

This is reinforced in the Samoan adage “*O Samoa na ifo mai lagi*” - Samoa was lowered from heaven (Fido 1995: 11).

The origins of the Samoans and the Polynesians originated have long been a subject of continuous academic theorising. Scholars such as Keesing (1934: 15) argue that the ancestral Polynesians, including the Samoans, originated in either the Americas or India due to the belief that Polynesians were a mixture of the Mongoloid-Caucasoid-Negroid race. Recent scholarly research strongly indicates the existence of an ancient seafaring civilisation, which originated in Southeast Asia, and later became the ancestral Polynesians, thus, the ancestral Samoans. This ancient civilisation possessed a ceramic culture and commonly referred to as the Lapita civilisation. The Lapita civilisation migrated up through Micronesia down towards Melanesia and finally settled and populated the Pacific (Bellwood 1987: 20ff). Kirch & Green (2001: 1) argue that the arrival of the ‘early Eastern Lapita’ peoples occurred around 1100-1000 BC, and it is from this point a distinctive Ancestral Polynesian culture developed four to five centuries later. Samoans, however, remain adamant about their origins, and this is re-enforced in their oral traditions.

The name Samoa derives from two words: *Sa* meaning ‘sacred’ and *moa* meaning, ‘centre,’ therefore, Samoa is ‘the sacred centre.’ Taule’ale’ausumai (1990: 31) claims that because Samoans already possessed their own cosmology of gods and etymology of creation, the Samoans’ concept of life revolved around the balance of forces of nature. Thus, the Samoans made sense of their world and the knowledge they acquired, learnt, organised and stored revealed a ‘certain’ way

of making their lives meaningful and more or less ordered. Survival, for the Samoans depended on basic requirements that allowed the ability to resist change but also enabled the Samoans' to adapt. It also relies on passive communal strength rather than aggressive individualism; and as a result, a complex Samoan society emerged. A society that has distinctive elements and possesses a 'high degree of human relations' both on a higher and lower levels of society, but also is present on a collective and individual perspective (Powles cited in McKay 1968: 1).

### c) **The principles of *fa'aSamoa***

Despite the Samoans' decentralised social and political structure, the Samoans did possess a social and cultural unity, *fa'aSamoa*. *Fa'aSamoa* possesses three fundamental principles – *ava*, *fa'aaloalo* and *alofa*.

Ngan-Woo (1985: 9) states that features such as *ava* (respect), *fa'aaloalo* (reverence/humility) and *alofa* (love), lie at the core of *fa'aSamoa*. Pio (1992: 1) also provides a broader interpretation: *alofaaga lautele o Samoa – alofa fua; fa'aaloaloga – va fealoa'i; fa'amateauga a tamali'i ma tulafale – matematega-tupua*. This highlights how Samoans not only live but also it hints to how Samoans' viewed themselves, and how they treat and expect to be treated by others. For many Samoans, the daily use of respectful behaviour and conduct either in everyday situations or during the ceremonial traditions ultimately defines what being 'Samoan' is. It is significant and considered honourable if an individual is able to display his/her use of respectful behaviour and understanding

of protocol. Here lies the underlying code for self-motivation, pride, status and dignity in one's self, of family, and of race. The Samoans are a proud people who see value in dignity and expect recognition both from strangers and among themselves. Novelist Robert Louis Stevenson (1911: 2ff) points out that the Samoans possess an 'elaborate courtliness,' that differentiates them from other Polynesians. More importantly, Samoans do not only practise these fundamental elements individually, but the structure of Samoan society also highlights these elements within all Samoan institutions.

The first principle *ava*, in this context has two distinctive interpretations. As mentioned above, it interprets simply as 'respect,' but it can also refer to a 'ritual drink' that is consumed on ceremonial occasions, notably the *ava* ceremony. Both translations highlight the significance of *ava* how it each is used and conducted on parallel planes. On one hand, it is from an individual's perspective to one's self and toward others; while on the other hand, ceremonial and social customs on a larger scale involving a whole village or a district is also an expression of showing respect to others.

From birth, a Samoan is taught to respect their parents, their elders, *matai* and members of the village and the village council. Respect towards authority and seniority symbolises an individual's upbringing in the 'right' *fa'aSamoa* way, which brings honour upon one's family. The Samoan proverb demonstrates this: "*O le tama a le tagata e fafaga i upu ma tu fa'aaloalo*" (The young of human beings feed on words and respect ways). Failure to be or act in a respectful manner indicates that not only the individual but also the individual's whole

family do not act or know the ‘right’ way according to *fa’aSamoa*. A family’s ability to act or failure to act correctly can have grave repercussions. For example, if a family fails to act accordingly to *fa’aSamoa* dissent within the village may occur. Such events carry severe reprimands are put into place to maintain a harmonious environment, failure to do so can be a slur on the reputation of the whole village. Reprimands are stern and a *sala* (sanctions) and are usually in the form of food, for contravening village rules or protocols. If the requests of the village *fono* are not obeyed then this can lead to, expulsion for the offender and sometimes the whole family.

*Ava* is also a ritual beverage used in the ceremonial gatherings of *matai*, either in the village council or when welcoming a *malaga* (visiting party). In this context it is significant that *ava* means and symbolises ‘great wisdom and deep thought’ by the village chiefs, in handling the affairs of the *nu’u*. It is the highest protocol extended to visitors, Samoans and non-Samoans by the *matai* of a *nu’u*. As Davidson (1967: 20) points out, every meeting begins with the *ava* ceremony and it the *tulafale*/orator calls out the order to which the gathered members are to drink. In this context, the ‘act’ of drinking the *ava* is of little importance but what is important is the order in which it is served has greater importance. It is a ‘subtle’ way of making each *matai* aware of the hierarchy within the village.

*Fa’aaloalo* translated to mean ‘reverence’ or ‘humility.’ In this context, *fa’aaloalo* is the ‘act’ of showing *ava*. For Samoans, *fa’aaloalo* and *ava* hold a great ideological significance and is an admirable trait by all Samoans. If one possesses or displays *ava*, either to one’s *aiga*, *matai* and *nu’u*, it illustrates an

individual's *fa'aaloalo*. *Fa'aaloalo* shown by either an individual or a village to others is the recognition of the 'va.' The word 'va' refers to the 'space between' or the 'gap' between oneself and everyone else such as *matai*, parents, children, adolescents and the ministers. Recognition of *va* occurs when social norms are utilised and obeyed. Failure to recognise the *va* is to offend. This is emphasised in the social 'golden rule' and that is "*aua le to'ia le va*" (do not step over the gap). Writer and scholar Albert Wendt (1991: 307) states that the nature of the *va* plays a crucial role in all the relationships of the Samoans. For example,

*Our va with others defines us. We can only be  
Ourselves linked to everyone and everything  
else in the Va, the Unity-that-is-All and Now.*

Vaai (1995: 54) also mentions the importance of the *va* as an integral element in Samoan life and underpins in all relationships among the Samoans. Furthermore, the *va* is at the heart of the *fa'amatai* and is a dominant factor in the social relationships that permeates the whole of Samoan society.

The last principle *alofa*, simply means to 'love.' In practice *alofa* can be shown as one's 'duty' to family, *matai* and village, and can be defined by one's actions; especially, in one's commitment to *fa'alavelave* (familial obligations).<sup>3</sup> One's participation in *fa'alavelave* is a symbol of one's *alofa* to their family and this can be in the form of taking care of guests, providing food, accommodation, financial support, and providing *ie toga* (fine mats). In this context, *alofa* is an example of one's *tautua* (loyalty), to one's kin and the thing that binds one to

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<sup>3</sup> *Fa'alavelave* literally means obstacles or to bother. It normally refers to and translates to commitments or obligations' to one's *matai*, *aiga* or village.

their *aiga*. It is a ‘living symbol’ of one’s *alofa*. *Tautua* is important aspect of *fa’aSamoa*, because it binds the all the fabric of communal life in Samoa (Nepo 1990: 25). The essence of *tautua* relies on complete obedience, mutual loyalty and mutual respect; moreover, it demands a whole life commitment to offering service for the benefit of another (ibid: 26).

These fundamental principles – *ava*, *fa’aaloalo*, *alofa* – lie at the heart of and define the crux of *fa’aSamoa*. It is at the centre of the universally understood cultural conventions, and is expressed and manifested in every aspect of the social, economic and political institutions of *fa’aSamoa*. Furthermore, the institutions of *fa’aSamoa* are literally an extension and expression of the principles of *fa’aSamoa*.

#### **d) The institutions of *fa’aSamoa***

To understand *fa’aSamoa* in the context of ‘totality’ and ‘way of life,’ one must first view all aspects of Samoa’s economic, social and political systems as ‘part of’ and interwoven into ‘one’ system, the *fa’amatai*. The *fa’amatai* is the chiefly system, and as Le Tagaloa states, the *socio-metric wheel*, with the *matai* at the hub (cited in Vaai 1995: 54). To investigate this complex and social structure one needs to take a closer look at the three institutions of *fa’aSamoa*, which every Samoan is part of and ultimately identifies him or her as a Samoan.

## 1. Aiga

Primarily the *aiga* refers to a 'unit' or 'household' as well as 'family' that recognises genealogical and kinship, through marriage, land and title ties. The *aiga* plays a central role within all Samoan political and socio-economic life and is an important component of *fa'aSamoa*. It is the responsibility of the *aiga* to teach the principles of *fa'aSamoa*. An *aiga* may consist of blood relatives but also may include persons with no blood connections but have been adopted and accepted as kin. Essentially, an *aiga* is all who acknowledge the leadership of one *matai* title.

Every Samoan has roots in two families. It is here one obtains his/her identity and membership into Samoan society (Ngan-Woo 1985: 9). Each *aiga* has and is formally recognised and identified by the *aiga's matai*. Through the chiefly title, the *aiga* is able to trace their origins to an ancestor, which also links that *aiga* to its land and village. Although members of an *aiga* may choose to live elsewhere, it is one's association and identity to a specific 'title' that automatically links and ties them to the village where the 'title' originates. For members of the *aiga* who reside in the village their title originates from they called the *aiga atoa*. The *aiga potopoto* refers to the extended family, and are members of that *aiga* but live elsewhere. It is this latter group that come together to discuss matters pertaining to the *aiga*, land and the appointment of a *matai*. It is the *aiga potopoto*, who possesses the right to select and bestow a 'title' on a

candidate of their choosing, and discuss matters concerning the *aiga*'s land and its resources (Davidson 1967: 37).

The *aiga potopoto*'s two lines of descent are acknowledged, the male – *itu malosi* (strong side) and the female – *itu vaivai* (weak side). Each line of descent has a voice in the appointment of the *matai* title. The appointed candidate to a *matai* must have gained succession and supported through the consensus of both sides – male and female – of the *aiga potopoto*. This process acknowledges and recognises both sides of an *aiga* and the *feagaiga* (covenant) between the *itu malosi* (male/strong side) and the *itu vaivai* (female/weak side). The whole process highlights the practice of *ava*, *fa'aaloalo* and a sign of each side's *alofa* ('Lance' 5 April 2001). The *va* between the two sides of the *aiga potopoto* is known as the *feagaiga* (covenant), and illustrates the *va* that exists between the male and female descent lines and the *va* within the *aiga* and their descendants.

Traditionally the role of the *aiga* centres on issues pertaining to family land and the bestowal of titles (Grattan 1948: 15) but the *aiga* is also the promoter of *fa'aSamoa*. The *aiga* teaches the young ideals such as communalism, and obedience in which the young serve and look after the old are taught. Schoeffel's claims, that the crux of Samoa's social classification and organisation is genealogy (1987:174). The sense of belonging and *tautua* are important psychological emotions that bind an individual to one's *aiga*. The Samoan proverb, "*Ouo i aso uma ao uso mo aso vale*" (*Friends for everyday but brothers/sisters for bad days*) highlights this. Unfortunately, this can also have negative effects on the *aiga*. In Albert Wendt's novel *Resurrection* (1999: 62ff)

the character Tala Fa'asolopito failure to redeem the wrong that occurred to his sister kept him from returning to his village. As a result his whole family suffered in 'his' shame and in turn became 'their' shame.

## 2. Matai

The word *matai* is made up from two words *mata* (eye) and *iai* (to or toward), and therefore, translates to 'looking toward' or 'up to another.' It also suggests 'being set apart' or 'consecrated' (Vaai 1999: 29). A *matai's* authority and power to control and influence centres on the 'supernatural power that stems from a divine ancestor' (ibid: 29). During the pre-Christian period, this power was fundamental to the role of the *matai*, because was the *matai* who performed the duties associated with that of a 'priest' and 'shaman' to appease the *aitu* (demons/spirits of deceased ancestors). An *aitu* was considered ancestral aristocrats, who took possession of another person or manifested themselves in the form of plants, fish, birds and animals (Fido 1995: 11). As the head of the *aiga*, the *matai* is the custodian of the family name, land and its resources. The *matai* also is the representative of the *aiga* in the village council.

The road to becoming a *matai* is illustrated in the Samoan saying, "*O le ala i le pule o le tautua*" (*the road to power is through service*). Authority and influence is only achievable through the assumption of a chiefly title. This is evident among the social norms of all male Samoans, for example, the term *taule'ale'a*, is referred to an untitled male. It is associated with youth and for a Samoan male, he will always be treated as a 'boy' and referred to a 'youth' socially despite advancing age. Upon the acquiring of *matai* the incumbent is then

empowered with *pule* (secular power), and is regarded fit to partake in the affairs of the *aiga* and the *nu'u* (Shore 1982: 64ff). The conferring a chiefly 'title' is called a *saofa'i*. *Saofa'i* is the Samoan polite word for *nofo* (sit), and is in reference to one's 'seat' in the village council. The *saofa'i* is the ceremonial passage of rite and introduction into the village council and affairs. It starts with an elaborate *ava* ceremony followed by the exchange of foodstuffs and fine mats from the newly appointed *matai's* family to the village members. As Shore (1982: 64) explains, feeding the village publicly demonstrates the new *matai's* commitment to his village and his obligations to support and protect all members who are not his kin. The *saofa'i* is the visible act of *ava*, *fa'aaloalo*, and *alofa*, which the *aiga* of the new *matai* must show towards the village; moreover, the *saofa'i* it is also the acknowledgement and acceptance of the village council of the *aiga's* choice of *matai*.

Consensus is an important factor in how Samoans conduct their affairs and imperative in all aspects of social interaction. All matters discussed either in the *aiga* or in the village council is deliberated upon until all *matai* have reached 'one' voice. As mentioned earlier, a *matai* may have the authority to influence but the 'real' authority lay in the hands of the descent group, the *aiga*. It is the *aiga* that ultimately reserves the right to bestow as well as revoke a 'title' from any holder who is judged unfit or unworthy to continue office (Meredith 14/04/2002).

There are two distinctive categories – the *ali'i* and the *tulafale*. The *ali'i* is referred to as the 'sitting chief.' The *ali'i* possesses a sacred and divine connection, while the *tulafale* is the 'talking chief.' The orator carries out the

executive duties of the *ali'i*, and is normally of lesser rank and status to the *ali'i*; although in some villages the *tulafale* is ranked higher than his counterpart is (Keesing 1934: 30). It is best to view the two distinctive type of *matai* as not different but complementary, as one cannot function without the other (Grattan 1948:14). All *matai* share a number of characteristics including possession of a title, within both kinship groups and villages, and the general honour and dignity that is linked to the titles. Although each *matai* may differ in terms of rank, general prestige and the formal powers to command, overall the *matai* holds a significant position in Samoan society.

At the higher levels of the Samoan political sphere, a consortium of *tulafale* ultimately links all the “families” of Samoa to their ancestral roots. This consortium is *Tumua ma Pule*. The significance of *Tumua ma Pule* stems from the legend of *Pili*, the son of *Tagaloa-Lagi* and *Sina Le Ana* the daughter of the *TuiManu'a*. Each of Samoa’s political divisions is appointed to *Pili*’s offspring. *Pili*’s eldest son *Ana* ruled the Western side of Upolu, forming the district of *A’ana* and possessed the sacred title of *TuiA’ana*. The second eldest *Tua* ruled the Eastern side and is named *Atua* with the sacred title *TuiAtua*. *Pili*’s third son *Tuamasaga* ruled the middle portion of Upolu and this is named after him. To his daughter *Tolufale*, *Pili* gave the *Aiga i le Tai* – family in the sea, which consists of the two islands Manono and Apolima. The districts on the island of Upoulo are ‘collectively’ referred to as *Tumua*. While on Savai’i the six seats of authority – Palauli, Itu o Palauli, Satuipaita, Itu o Satupaita, Safotu and Vaisigano – and is ‘collectively’ referred to as *Pule*. The political divisions of the Samoan society

also highlight the social makeup and the dynamics of Samoan society. This is reinforced in the Samoan proverbs, “*O Samoa ua uma ona tofi*” (*the institutions of Samoa have been appointed*) and “*O Samoa ua taoto ao se ia mai moana, aua ole ia o Samoa ua uma ona aisa*” (*Samoa is like an ocean fish divided into sections*).

The most important duty of *Tumua ma Pule* is the ‘right’ to bestow the paramount titles upon a certain candidate. These paramount titles: *TuiA’ana*, *TuiAtua*, *Gatoaitetele* and *Tamasoali’i* is collectively called the ‘*papa*’ titles. When a candidate holds all the four *papa* titles, that person becomes the *tafa’ifa* (literally, the four in one). It is important to note that while *Tumua ma Pule* may possess the right to bestow the paramount titles, but each side only have the authority to bestow their *papa* title to a candidate. For example, in theory *Tumua* has no authority to appoint a title that is in Savai’i or under the authority of *Pule*. The *saofai’i* of an appointed candidate to a paramount title must take place in the district’s capital. For instance, the *saofa’i* of the *TuiAtua* title must be in Lufilufi and take place only on the *malae* Laulaufuaga. It is important to note, that it is through this intricate network of *papa* titles and the consortium of *Tumua ma Pule* that all the ‘families,’ thus, Samoans is connected to the mythical *Pili*, and is part of Samoa’s social and political framework.

### 3. Nu’u & Fa’amatai

According to Shore (1982: 51), the *nu’u* is a generic Samoan term for settlement and interpreted to mean a village. In the context of *fa’aSamoa*, the *nu’u*

is not only a separate and political entity but also part of a larger social and political structure. Both Meleisea (1987b: chapter 2) and Shore (1982: chapter 3) point out that although there existed reference to a single national authority and the idea of a centralised system, in reality, each *nu'u* possessed its own particular history, and hierarchical status, and rules that pertain to that particular village. Each *nu'u* has its identity. No two *nu'u* are same in status or rank, and the status and rank of each *nu'u* is acknowledged in the *fa'alupega*.<sup>4</sup>

Every *nu'u* consists of several *aiga*, and each household's *matai* sits in the *fono o le nu'u* (village council). Every village *fono* exercises its own autocratic authority and conducts itself independently from other *nu'u*. As the governing body, the *fono* stipulate all the laws that affect the villagers, visitors, and activities that occur in the *nu'u*, and the surrounding area of the village such as the access to plantations or the sea.

All members of a village belong to one of the five social groups in the village. The *aualuma* or *tamaita'i*, consists of daughters of the *matai* and any girl born in the *nu'u*. The *aumaga* consists of the sons of the *matai* and the untitled men of the *nu'u*, and are the "strength" of the *nu'u*, and the enforcers of the decisions that come from the village *fono*. For the young and untitled men membership and obedience is a major part of their *tautua* as part of their rite of passage, if they aspire to take their place in the village *fono* themselves someday. The *faletua ma tausima* consists of the wives of the *matai* and enjoys an active role that is complementary to that of the village council, their husbands. The last and

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<sup>4</sup> *Fa'alupega* – universally recognised set of official and formal greetings, it also provides insight to the political and social dynamics within a *nu'u*.

most important is the *fono matai*, the village council, consists of all the *matai* of the village, possesses, and makes all administrative policies and laws within the *nu'u*. All five groups operate in unison with the *matai* at the centre; this is the *fa'amatai* (*matai* system). The *fa'amatai* is the “social organisation of *matai* and their heirs” which has “evolved out of the fusion of the institution of family and a hierarchical system of *matai* titles” (Vaai 1999: 29).

### e) Conclusion

The concept of *fa'aSamoa* is a complex one and is not simply the ‘Samoan way.’ *Fa'aSamoa* not only originates from Samoa’s mythical past but it is also embedded in all aspects of Samoa’s social and political framework. At the core of *fa'aSamoa* are fundamental elements such as *ava*, *fa'aaloalo* and *alofa*, which is manifested and expressed in the institutions of *fa'aSamoa*. The Samoans’ adherence to these fundamental principles and maintenance of *fa'aSamoa* is Samoans acknowledgement of the *va*. *Fa'aSamoa* unifies all Samoans under a homogenous cultural umbrella, and enjoyed several interpretations such as a ‘concept of traditions,’ which is a ‘WAY of life,’ a ‘distinctive identity’ and ‘the Samoan way.’

## **Part II – *fa'aSamoa* in Nui Sila (New Zealand).**

### Preamble.

Part II of this investigation looks at what is *fa'aSamoa* in New Zealand, and concentrates specially on the Samoan community in Christchurch. The preamble to Part II aims to provide background information to some of the motives that lay behind the mass migration of Samoan migrants to New Zealand during the late 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. It also explores the objectives of the New Zealand government at the time.

There is a long established relationship between Samoa and New Zealand. It started when the New Zealand government took control over the Samoan Islands from the German empire at the outbreak of World War I. As part of an agreement between the United States of America, Great Britain and New Zealand, the three Allied forces partitioned the Samoan Islands. The Samoan Islands on the east became a colony of the United States of America, and named American Samoa. The Samoan Islands on the west came to be Western Samoa, and placed in the hands of the New Zealand Administration. In 1920, the League of Nations made Western Samoa a mandate under the New Zealand government, until Western Samoa gained independence in 1962.

Samoans (including part Samoans) have been in New Zealand since 1874; although numbers fluctuated considerably it never exceeded 50. That is until 1921

when, an increase of 164 Samoans resided in New Zealand (Finn 1973:28). According to Fairburn (1961:19), the presence of New Zealand servicemen and public servants in Samoa, during the New Zealand Administration eventually lead to many New Zealand servicemen marrying Samoan women. Many of the early Samoans in New Zealand, at this time were the children of these unions, who came to New Zealand for formal training and education. Furthermore, the children of these unions, normally referred to by Samoans as *afakasi(s)*<sup>\*</sup> officially viewed as Europeans. Thus, a socio-cultural tie to New Zealand already existed. Although it is not until the post-war period, that the number of the Samoan migrants increase significantly.

After World War II, the New Zealand government embarked on a policy of import-substitution based urban industrialisation. It aimed at lessening the country's dependence on core states but also aimed at generating opportunities for local capital and labour (Macpherson 1997:86). New Zealand's colonial links with Samoa provided a ready supply of cheap labour to fill the vacant positions in the manufacturing sectors. Moreover, New Zealand's lax in migration policies and new economic direction, provided the Samoan immigrants better opportunities.

Many of the early Samoan arrivals during this time were full-blooded, young and from the rural villages (Fairbairn 1961:20). Initially, these early Samoan migrants were young and single males; however, as opportunities in the manufacturing industries demanded for more women, the number of young single Samoan females increased. As the demand for more Samoan women workers in

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\* *afakasi* - Samoan word for half-caste Samoans, usually relating to Samoan and European descent.

New Zealand increased, their families in Samoa supported it. They were more reliable and committed to their 'mission,' that is, remitting money back to their families and more likely to adhere to *fa'aSamoa* (Macpherson 1997:89).

The primary objective of these Samoan immigrants in New Zealand was to work and send money back to Samoa to their families. The conditions of their work permits allowed them to stay for a time of three months, and only if they already booked passage back to Samoa. Samoan migrants who wanted to or intended to remain permanently needed to meet certain criteria. Many Samoans needed to meet certain criteria such as good health, character, guarantees of employment and housing. Furthermore, an age restriction was placed on all Samoan migrants including families, who applied as a unit needed to a six-month probationary period (Pitt & Macpherson, 1974:17).

These early Samoan migrants formed the first link of the 'chain process.' As the early Samoan migrants settled into their new environment money was sent back to Samoa, to send other members of the same family to New Zealand. It became normal to have several members of one family working in the same place of employment or living in the same house, in New Zealand.

In 1962 the Treaty of Friendship was signed between New Zealand and Samoa, however, very few New Zealanders knew anything or very little about Samoa or the Samoan people. Although there was no attempt on the part of New Zealand to make the Samoans' transition to 'Kiwi' life easy, the Samoans soon adjusted to New Zealand conditions. This is because the size of the ethnic group

and the Samoans' ability to organise assistance within, without having to resort to cultural introspection (Finn 1973:21).

Although, New Zealand and Samoa enjoyed a long history, and cemented in the Treaty of Friendship signed in 1962, this did not necessarily mean that many New Zealanders knew a lot about Samoa or the Samoan people. There was no attempt on the part of New Zealand society to the Samoans' transition easier; instead, the dominant society believed that if Samoans adapted to their values and traditions, they would be more acceptable. Nevertheless, Samoans have adjusted to New Zealand conditions more adequately than other islanders have, as this could be due to the size of ethnic group and dual influences of ability to organise assistance without having to resort to cultural introspection (Finn 1973:21). As Durkheim argues, that Samoan communities were characterised by the "social integration (extensive and intimate attachments) and by moral integration (shared beliefs about morality and behaviour)," (Durkheim cited in Macpherson 1997:81).

For the Samoan immigrant, New Zealand was the place of 'milk and honey,' and a better life, access to material goods, and an opportunity to provide their own children with better educational opportunities. These desires became universal motives that lay behind the decision for many of the Samoan immigrants, to come to New Zealand. Samoans viewed education as a vehicle for socio-economic well being, and social mobility. For many young Samoans migration to New Zealand provided this (Franco 1992 cited Va'a 2001:304-306). Furthermore, wage employment became the best way for many young Samoans to

contribute to the *fa'alavelave* of their *aiga*, church through the regular remittances back to their families in Samoa.

While the early Samoan migrants, in retrospect, adapted and can be viewed to have 'fitted' into New Zealand society, the Samoans insisted on forming new networks among themselves, and maintained their cultural traditions, built their Samoan churches, and conducted themselves and re-created the *fa'aSamoa* in New Zealand.

The next three chapters will look at how *fa'aSamoa* functions, viewed and defined among the Samoans Christchurch community. To do this one will focus on the institutions of *fa'aSamoa* – *aiga*, *matai* and the Church.

## Chapter 2: *Aiga*

*Aiga is family, its where I come from...  
my identity...my heritage ...as a Samoan...  
but my aiga does not define me as a person...  
I'm me...a product of my time...my parents...  
that is part of a bigger aiga.*

(“Maria” NZB Group A 2002)

Within the New Zealand landscape, the institution of the *aiga* has undergone a series of changes from its traditional function and significance, to ensure the survival and maintenance of the *fa'aSamoa*. This chapter examines the institution of the *aiga*. It will look at how the impact of migration has contributed to the changes within the *aiga* and its repercussions. It will also explore the impact of new ideals, attitudes, and practices have challenged the traditional function and significance of the *aiga*. Finally, this chapter will uncover how the custom of *fa'alavelave* (familial obligations) has affected on the institution of the *aiga* and on the *fa'aSamoa*.

### a) **Impact of Migration**

The institution of the *aiga* lies at the heart of all Samoa's traditional social, economic and political structures. Traditionally, the *aiga* is the “household” or

‘corporate unit’ (Grattan 1948:12; Gilson 1970:15) and the true owner of land and titles in Samoa has enabled the principles and traditions beliefs of *fa’aSamoa* to persist. Upon arriving to New Zealand, many Samoan migrants found themselves in an environment that was not conducive to their ideals. For many Samoan migrants ideals such individualism and ‘nuclear’ households were foreign.

Many of the earlier Samoan migrants came to New Zealand during the 1960s and early 1970s, the majority of them came to ‘work and send money home.’ The majority of the early Samoan born Samoans (SBS) participants were single and met their spouses in New Zealand. The majority of these early SBS participants came to Christchurch from either Auckland or Wellington to “look around” and seek new employment opportunities. In contrast, the later group of Samoan born Samoans’ motive behind migrating to New Zealand was to “start a new life for themselves and their children.” In addition, unlike the early Samoan migrants, these later arrivals came to New Zealand with their small families straight from Samoa, to family members already living in Christchurch.

### **1. *Aiga* in the Christchurch setting**

Migration has played a major role in determining the significance and relevance of the *aiga* in Christchurch. From the outset, all the SBS participants in both Group A and Group B despite age and length of stay in New Zealand identified the *aiga* as a ‘corporate unit,’ and stated the importance of ‘kinship’ ties, their identity, and one’s *fanua ma le matai* (land and title); furthermore, all

adhered to the traditional ideals and practices of *fa'aSamoa*. As one respondent states,

*The aiga is the most important thing for Samoans, it is where you come from and take with you wherever you go...it is with you always, in everything you do, think and say...that's what the aiga is and ... part of fa'aSamoa.*

(“Viva” SBS Group A)

In contrast, all the New Zealand born Samoans (NZB) participants stated that they understood the significance and the function of the *aiga*. Yet, the emotional ties and commitments to the ‘extended’ kin and village *aiga* were absent. The majority of the NZB participants did not identify with the social hierarchy, and the social norms or its importance within the village and how this influences their parents’ level of commitment. For instance,

*I don't understand why we have to always send money for a cousin's wedding, I don't know...a matai's saofai... or money for a church building I probably will never see...I don't know them.*

(“Lyd” NZB Group A)

The absence of a close, extended family network within a village setting may contribute to the lack of emotional ties many of the NZB participants in both Group A and Group B expressed. However, this did not deter the majority of the SBS participant, even though two thirds of them have spent most of their lives in New Zealand. The emotional ties or lack of, towards the wider Samoan community may seem to influence how one defines one’s *aiga*.

Within the Christchurch setting, the majority of the SBS respondents in both Groups A and B stated that the “*aiga*” now enjoys a wider definition. For instance,

*Aiga...my own aiga is very big but there are not many of them here [Christchurch]...you don't have to be 'really' related...now people from the same village, and even pitu nu'u [district], members of the same church are called aiga.*

(“Ata” SBS Group A)

In stark contrast, the majority of the NZB participants did not share these same “emotional or cultural ties” outside their immediate and extended families in New Zealand and in Samoa. The excerpt below is typical of the responses from many of the NZB respondents,

*family to me is everything...when I say family I mean my parents and their parents, aunts, uncles, cousins and my brothers and sisters...that's about it...sure I have family in Samoa but I don't really know them.*

(“Paul” NZB Group B)

Although all the NZB participants in both Groups A and in Group B were aware that their definition of *aiga* differed from their SBS counterparts, all acknowledged the ‘traditional’ meanings because it symbolises and plays a major role in maintenance of *fa'aSamoa*. Furthermore, their commitment towards the ‘traditional’ definition and lack of commitment towards their ‘extended’ family in Samoa and within the Christchurch community; however, this did not mean that it made them less Samoan. Although this may seem hypocritical, it highlights one of the many paradoxes that have emerged from this research, which the majority of

the NZB participants admitted to possessing and recognising Western concepts in their definition of *aiga*; it did not mean they acknowledged the strong emotional ties and the cultural significance of what *aiga* represents.

## 2. *Aiga and Identity*

The *aiga* is the source and foundation of Samoan identity. It provides a Samoan with an identity that relates to where one comes from, one's village, and one's kin and kinship obligations (Ngan-Woo 1985:9). Nearly all the participants interviewed expressed similar definitions and identified the *aiga* as the source of their 'identity.' However, the NZB respondents in both Group A and B, expressed ideals such as 'individuality' that is alien to the 'Samoan psyche.' For example,

*no...my name is [...], my parents are [...], they come from [...].I was born here [New Zealand] and I am Samoan.*

("Fia" NZB Group A)

For the majority of all the SBS participants in both Group A and Group B, the concept of *aiga* and individuality is incompatible, as the excerpt below illustrates, *aiga* and identity are integrally linked,

*Samoans (SBS) are different...they ask, what is your name....what is your father's name...where/what is your village in Samoa...then they start recapping and naming your whole family.*

("Mary" NZB Group B)

Although this reflects many of the NZB participants' exposure to Western ideals, education and New Zealand social environment, possessing these traits did not make them feel less 'Samoaan.'

Studies such as Macpherson (1996) and Anae (1997) highlight how many of the New Zealand born Samoan generation have had to construct their own identity that is reflective of their Samoan ethnicity, culture, and heritage and their place of birth, New Zealand. Macpherson (1996:138) argues that the New Zealand born and Samoan born/raised population<sup>5</sup> have more in common with New Zealand society, than their island born parents. As a result, a new 'identity' within New Zealand based on shared experiences is slowly replacing their parents' culture (Macpherson 1996:137-139).

Nearly all of the NZB participants in both Group A and B stated that they could relate to and 'are part of,' and recognise this new 'identity.' They spoke English fluently and little of their own language, and have similar life experience in dealing with mainstream society's values, institutions, and formal education (Macpherson 1996:138). Although most of the NZB participants were aware of how their 'culture' and how the social norms and practices of *fa'aSamoa* differed from mainstream, many felt comfortable with their place in New Zealand society. As one informant states,

*Identity is knowing who I am...Samoans [SBS] call you "Kiwi" or New Zealand born...New Zealanders call you Samoan or "you're a New Zealand born Samoan"...or you're a PI [Pacific Islander]... identity is really where you are in life.*  
 ("Stevie" NZB Group A)

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<sup>5</sup> 'Raised population' here refers to the Samoan born Samoan migrants who have been raised in New Zealand.

According to Spickard *et al.* (2002:44-45) identity is also ‘situational’ and varies depending on who is doing the asking. For instance,

*I have learned to identify what I think people are really asking. Sometimes they are actually asking, “What makes you the same as me?” Yet, more often it is, “What makes you different?” If asked this question in New Zealand by a non-Samoan, I identify myself as Samoan. If the asker is Samoan, I acknowledge my heritage: “My mother is palagi and my father is Samoan.” When I am out of New Zealand and am asked by a non-Samoan, I identify myself as a New Zealander; if a Samoan asks, my answer is the same, but I qualify it with “but my father is Samoan.” These replies are generally satisfactory.*

(Siteine cited in Spickard 2002:45)

All the NZB participants identified with this and acknowledged that utilising ‘multiple identities’ is one way to deal with the “What makes you different” questions. All the NZB respondents state it puts other people, Samoan and non-Samoans at ease and lets them know ‘how they approach you.’ Macpherson (1984:113) also states, “being Samoan will mean different things to different people.” It became apparent during the course of this discussion that the environment, created either consciously and unconsciously by one’s parents, plays a major role in determining how many NZB participants adopt particular orientations to Samoan (and *palagi*) values and institutions.

During this investigation, an important factor emerges but rarely given voice, which is the issue of identity issue among the SBS participants raised in New Zealand. Three of the SBS participants in Group A, and over a third of the SBS participants in Group B have received formal schooling in New Zealand and

have acquired New Zealand citizenship; yet, they are still regarded as Samoan by other Samoans, both Samoan born and New Zealand born Samoans, and mainstream. It became evident for these SBS participants that being fluent in Samoan, and a good command of the English language, and spending over half of their life in New Zealand or sharing similar life experiences to many of the NZB participants did not matter; because the issue of 'identity' for this group meant that 'place of birth' determined 'their' identity. As this respondent informs us,

*I came to Christchurch in 1982, I was 15 and started at Hillmorton High School...it was very hard...the palagi called me a "real" Samoan...but the New Zealand born Samoans called me FOB, Freshie...now at 37 things have not really changed...my accent is not so bad...but I'm still a FOB and a Freshie...because I was born in Samoa. My aiga still expect me to behave and stick with the real fa'aSamoa way... it doesn't matter that I have lived in Christchurch nearly half my life...they still speak to me in Samoan, expect me to contribute to fa'alavelave and if not...I'm fia palagi.*

(“Tony” SBS Group A)

This highlights how one's 'identity' is not simply the decision of the individual, as many New Zealand born Samoans claim or a certificate of Permanent Residency, it is 'where you are born' and how others, Samoans and non-Samoans identify you.

For the majority of the NZB participants the generic classification, 'Pacific Islanders' (PI), is a term accepted and used by many. However, nearly all of the SBS participants interviewed abhor this term. One SBS participant in Group A simply responded, "PI, what's that?" when asked, "do you engage in or with other PI groups?" After an extensive explanation of what PI meant, Pacific

Islander(s) including Tongans, Cook Islanders and so on, the majority of the SBS participants found it incomprehensible,

*PI, I absolutely hate that term...how can you lump all Pacific Islanders together under one banner... its like saying Indians, Filipinos, and Chinese are all the same because of geography.*

(“Lia” SBS Group A)

The term “PI” is a *palagi* construction that implies homogeneity throughout the pacific (Anae 1997:106), but it fails to differentiate the social organisational structure of the pacific peoples. As Nokise (1978:2) states, Samoans are differentiated in extended or *aiga* lines, Cook Islanders on island lines and Niueans on village lines.

It is becoming cool and acceptable to identify with being ‘Samoan.’ The growing visibility and success of other Samoans such as professional boxer David Tua, the Manu Samoa Rugby Team, All Blacks Michael Jones, Bryan Williams, actors David Fane and Robbie Magasiva, comedian Oscar Kightley, have contributed to breaking down negative stereotypes. Moreover, the presence of Samoan opera singers such as Jonathon Lemalu and Lapi Mariner, and hip-hop rapster Scribe, have also seen Samoans venture out in other areas that is not normally associated with Samoans. That is, it is “cool to be Samoan” and maintaining cultural awareness and identifying “ethnic” origins have made it more acceptable within New Zealand society; furthermore, it allows the *fa’aSamoa* to be more visible outside the traditional areas of the home or church, create a more comfortable environment for all Samoans.

**b) Challenges to the *fa'aSamoa***

Over time, migrants and the following generations adopt and adapt elements of a new culture within their own culture (Hendrikse 1995:1), sometimes to ensure the survival of its own. Within the Christchurch setting, exposure to new ideologies such as individualism and personal autonomy, choice, and personal identity are proving to be real threats to the psychological, and traditional structure, and significance of the *aiga*.

One significant influence is formal education. Access to formal education is one of the major incentives many of the Samoan migrants stated as the reason many migrated to New Zealand. Education, among the Samoans is the “key” to success. Utumapu (1992:1) stated that education is so valued among the Samoan migrants because their own “vulnerable socio-economic position caused them to look to schooling as a means of enhancing the chances of social mobility for their children.” However, many of the Samoan migrants were not prepared or aware of how the Western education would influence on their children; in particular, the different world perspective, traditions, beliefs and value system, which differed from their own.

## 1. Education and its Impact

The benefits and the importance of a good education are not lost on the Samoans. Samoans believed it would secure a good job and an “easy life.” As Ioane (1987:249) illustrates,

*As an agent for cultural innovation, education has been the main stimulant for many of the many changes in their homeland, now that they are in New Zealand, many Pacific Island parents have shown a great interest in education.*

Access to a Western education was the major incentive for many of the SBS participants in both Group A and in Group B, to settle in New Zealand. This is evident in the two excerpts below are from two SBS participants. The first is a respected elder, who has resided in Christchurch since 1979; the latter since 1999.

*Three of our older kids are born in Samoa...we came to New Zealand in 1975...in Samoa it is a hard life... and to get a good job you must have a good education... But it is very hard to school your children there...so we [wife and I] decided to come to New Zealand...here the school is good...for the future of our kids...*  
 (“George” SBS Group A)

*We arrive here [Christchurch] now about 3 years... we [wife and I] came here to help our family [in Samoa] and to make sure our kids have a good education...its getting very hard to get a good education in Samoa... because if you are good...its OK...but if you are not so good...then you are left behind...or you work in the plantation...here school is good and available for everyone.*  
 (“Paulo” SBS Group B)

Although the two excerpts illustrate how education is valued, many of the Samoan migrants were unprepared of how the impact education would have on

maintaining their *fa'aSamoa*. For many of the SBS parents in both Group A and in Group B believed, education would equip their children with the 'tools' of success. However, the reality is, according to the majority of the NZB participants interviewed that these 'tools' presented a schism with their parents' world – the *fa'aSamoa* and within mainstream society.

All the NZB participants in this discussion confess to and express the pressure and expectation to 'do well' is expected from each of their parents. The pressure to be or 'why don't you be like [...] syndrome' were ways many of their parents employed to make them more 'ambitious.' Nearly all SBS participants in Group A and Group B stated that this method was a 'way of putting pride and ambition' and 'guts' into our kids. Unfortunately, many of the parents within the SBS participants could not relate to nor understand the feelings of inadequacy, isolation, and the various forms of racism, many of their children experienced throughout their formative years. The majority of the NZB participants in Group A stated that they were usually the only Samoan or one of the few their most of the schools they attended. In retrospect, the majority of the NZB participants in Group A attributed their failure to perform to their parents' expectations to their inability to 'fit in' and 'confusion.' For many of these NZB participants their home life was not conducive to their school life. That is, home life was *fa'aSamoa* and outside the home was *palagi*. For example,

*Looking back on my school days I can see how the 'system' is geared up to promote the palagi ideals...individuality...and to make it is to have a good job...good house...all the material goods...but for us, there is no 'I'...no friends...stay home...do chores...look after*

*the kids...go to church...obey your parents.*  
 (“Miles” NZB Group A)

Although home life promoted and centred on *fa’aSamoa* values, ‘understanding’ these values was not emphasised. Strict disciplinary guidelines and emphasis on values such as respect and obedience featured prominently; however, the importance and ability to speak Samoan language was not encouraged. For the many of the NZB participants in Group A, the inability to speak Samoan fluently, is the telling factor that affected them, individually and as a generation. Most of the NZB respondents in Group A claimed that if they did speak Samoan fluently, they might have had a better understanding and a deeper appreciation of *fa’aSamoa*. The following examples highlight how home life for many of the NZB members in Group A differed from that of their peers, in school and in other social settings.

*Home life was strictly fa’aSamoa...mum and dad spoke Samoan, we spoke English...at school there were very few Samoans, even Islanders, so we [siblings] just mingled in with the Maori students...there were more of them...most of the palagi did not know the difference...school life was very palagi.*  
 (“Teri” NZB Group A)

*My choice to not make my kids speak Samoan was for them...I did it so they would not be ‘confused’ when they go to school...I don’t think that now, because my kids want to speak Samoan....but it is very hard for them, because they are now older...they say to me ‘Why did you not teach us before?’*  
 (“Lance” SBS Group A)

For many of the NZB participants in Group A, home life may not have been conducive in preparing them for school life then, however, now there have been inroads made.

Unlike the NZB participants in Group A, the majority of the NZB respondents and SBS participants in Group B did not express any doubts regarding issues such as identity and acceptance; furthermore, they also claimed home life and school life was very balanced. For instance,

*My parents spoke Samoan at home...although it was not dictated at home for me to speak Samoan it was just natural...everyone spoke Samoan...my uncle and his wife and their kids...we all spoke it at home...church...and to my friends at school.*

(“Tai” NZB Group B)

*There are quite a few Samoans at school...we have a [Samoan] culture group...we also have our ‘own’ space...most of us speak Samoan to each other...mum and dad speak Samoan to me...I answer them either in Samoan or English.*

(“Gus” NZB Group B)

It is clear that the new ‘cultural’ approach in schools is an attempt to deal with feelings of alienation, which many of the first generation New Zealand born Samoans experience.

To establish a home environment conducive to the school environment is one of the major concerns to emerge during this investigation in particular, among the NZB parents in both Group A and Group B. For many of the NZB respondents, who now as parents confess to pushing their children harder in academic schoolwork. This is to ensure that their children get the best education available to them, which means providing an accommodating environment. For example,

*As a parent, I’m more active in my children’s school studies and school activities. I think that it makes such a difference to your children when they see that you*

*participate...my parents were working ...they just didn't think that extra curriculum activities mattered... all they wanted to see was my school report...and parent/teacher meetings.*

(“Loma” NZB Group A)

Providing a supportive and balanced environment is an issue that is of concern for the majority of the SBS parents in Group B. The majority of the SBS parents in Group B stated that the option to put their younger children in childcare facilities run by the Samoan churches such as Language Nests and Early Childcare/Kindergartens was a more desirable choice. For many of these parents their decision centred on retaining the Samoan language and demonstrating their support towards their church and Samoan community. As one respondent states,

*I have 4 kids...my eldest is at intermediate...two are in primary, and the youngest is in kindy...all of them speak Samoan...at home and they also speak English... I want them to know their language, because in New Zealand everyone speaks English...and it is easy to pick up but if you don't keep your own language [Samoan] or speak it everyday...it is easy to lose and hard to speak it again...like many of the New Zealand borns.*

(“Lea” SBS Group B)

As the researcher, one of the interesting factors that emerged was that all the SBS participants, who are parents, referred to and identified their children as ‘Samoans.’ It is interesting to note, that many of the SBS parents in Group B refer to many first generation of New Zealand born Samoans as the ‘New Zealand born;’ however, they did not identify their own children, who some of them were born in New Zealand, as part of this group.

For all the Samoan participants in both Group A and in Group B their desire for their children to succeed and perform within mainstream New Zealand is very high. It is a reflection of their efforts and sacrifices to provide their children a good education. If a child is successful at whatever he/she does and becomes a productive member of the community, it is justification for reasons for leaving Samoa. The lean years, the sacrifices and injustices many SBS participants experience become irrelevant. Alternatively, when he/she do not perform well, it is an embarrassment, shame, and a sense of failure for all. For example,

*Of course, we are shame when none of our kids do well in the lao'ga [school]...we feel shame in front of other Samoans, especially when their kids are doing well...but there is nothing we can do.*

(“Sina” SBS Group A)

The majority of the SBS participants in both Group A and in Group B voice major concerns about the lack of ‘real’ achievement from a generation born and raised in New Zealand. Some SBS respondents comment on how education is ‘wasted’ by too many of the New Zealand born generation, referring to those that have gone through the education system and those that are still in it. The problem, as many see it lies in the attitude of those towards education. For example,

*Many of these kids [NZB Samoans] are lucky...they have a chance to do really well...but too much mucking around...that makes me really inoio [disgusted] with them... they only talk about what they don't have and how hard it is for them to deal with the 'stuff' at schools*

(“Elizabeth” SBS Group A)

*I feel sorry for these kid's parents...they work hard to send them to school and they [kids] just waste their time... muck around I went to school with a lot of New Zealand borns...they don't try their hardest, they don't worry about tomorrow...they only see and want for now... that's their problem*

(“Moana” SBS Group B)

For many of the SBS participants, the frustration comes from their children's lack of effort, and their lack of belief, and no ‘guts,’ is more disappointing.

## **2. The impact of Western Values**

Within the context of the *aiga*, concepts such as individualism and ‘personal autonomy’ are incompatible with maintaining *fa'aSamoa*, as it challenges the norms of *fa'aSamoa*. As Sua'ali'i argues,

*The family is the unit of life rather than the individual, yet individual initiative, equality of opportunity for all, women's rights, and personal privacy...increasingly valued ideals of western people are foreign to the Samoans...and as mainstream New Zealand society are influenced by the eco-political ethos of Western liberalism, for many first and second generation migrants and New Zealand born and raised Samoans, growing up in New Zealand challenged their perception of and allegiance to the 'fa'aSamoa'*

(Sua'ali'i cited in Macpherson 2001:173)

One of the major differences to emerge between the Samoan born Samoans and New Zealand born Samoans centres on how ‘education and its rewards’ influences and contributes towards the *aiga*. Roach states, “an educated

child is an *aiga* resource, an investment in the future,” and “another avenue for Samoans to acquire ‘status’ in the New Zealand environment” (cited in Utumapu 1992:55). As mentioned earlier, the majority of the SBS participants in Group A and in Group B view education as the ‘key’ and the ‘vehicle’ for both the betterment of their children, themselves, their *aiga* and of all Samoans. For instance,

*education for our children is very important...  
we want our children to have good schooling  
so that they can have a good life...help  
the family [in fa'alavelave]...and our people  
("Lance" SBS Group A)*

Many of the SBS participants, explained that the ‘betterment’ of their *aiga* relied heavily on how the New Zealand born children adhered to the traditional principle of *ava* – respect and obedience. Furthermore, many of the SBS participants assumed that because they were Samoans and were dedicated to *fa'aSamoa*, their children would naturally follow suit. As Anae states, the New Zealand born generation is expected to

*Go to church, be a good Samoan, and that meant  
to try your best at education, and looking after  
family, and to family functions, plus we've got to  
look after them when they're old.  
(Anae 1998:166)*

Nearly all the NZB respondents in both Group A and B identified with these expectations, and believed it their duty to take care of their parents; yet, many stated that it would be ‘their’ choice to do so, not because of the *fa'aSamoa* prompting them. Many of the NZB respondents in both Group A and in Group B

responded strongly about the pressure placed on them by the wider Samoan community to fulfil their commitments to *fa'aSamoa*, and resented how their 'choices' are scrutinised by other Samoans.

During the course of this research, nearly all the participants noted how the number of older New Zealand born Samoans is not visible in Christchurch. It is emphasised more by the lack of numbers in the church, and in church and the activities of the *aiga*. The majority of NZB participants stated that the 'pressure' to conform and participate in the Samoan community, namely came from their parents' desire of having you be 'seen' by the community. As these participants are now older many of the NZB participants in Group A claimed that their decision to or not to participate equated to maintaining their 'independence' and sense of 'individuality.' Now that many of these participants have 'matured' reflecting the 'valued ideals of Western people' have become a large part of which they are, and the strict *fa'aSamoa* upbringing have made them a better person. Although their actions are scrutinised by 'others' in the Samoan community is a source of constant irritation. As Maiava (2001:83) notes

*That the concepts of obedience to authority,  
obedience and love, giving are all intertwined  
but also give rise to internal tensions creating  
ambivalence towards not only the family  
but towards the entire culture.*

Another reason for the lack of older New Zealand born Samoans within the Samoan Christchurch community is their pursuit for better economic and employment opportunities. This has lead many to take opportunities to other parts of New Zealand and abroad. For instance,

*Two of my kids are in Australia...one is in  
Amerlika (USA), the other one in Aukilani.  
And [...] is a faifeau wife in [...] in  
Samoa, and two are still here [Christchurch]...  
we are sad they go but ...now they have kids and  
start their own aiga we are still busy with the church  
and we like to go visit our kids for holidays.  
("Olo" SBS Group A)*

All the SBS parents in Group B were adamant that their children 'will' live at home and insist on teaching their children the 'traditional' ideals and practices of *fa'aSamoa*. However, the majority of the SBS parents in Group A seemed to have resigned to the reality that their children might 'leave the nest' or assert more independence and follow their own future. For many of the older SBS participants being more supportive of their adult children's decision in employment, lifestyles is more becoming easier. It may be due to that many are now grandparents and focus on making sure their children and grandchildren 'fit in' within mainstream society.

Western concepts such as individualism and personal self-sufficiency is normally associated with New Zealand born Samoans, however, it is not an issue expressed among the Samoan born Samoans. This issue emerged as a major concern for the younger Samoan born Samoans and the Samoan born/New Zealand raised participants in this study. Pitt & Macpherson (1974:21-23) investigation found that for many Samoan migrants' decision to move out of the initial sponsor's house were based on reasons such as marriage, making room for new arrivals, a change in employment and many wanting more 'freedom.'

This concept of 'freedom' was discussed in detail during the interviews and discussion groups, in particular, the living arrangements and socialising

practices. It aimed to highlight different reasons for movement back and forth, and the consequences of such action, as well as showing any similarities and differences between the Samoan born and New Zealand born Samoans. A large number of the single SBS participants and NZB participants in Group B are flatting with their partners, friends or other single relatives, compared to only one NZB respondent in Group A. Most of the SBS participants in Group B stated that their decision to flat or live elsewhere other than with their original sponsor was because of the harsh treatment many experienced there. Moreover, all of these participants mentioned that they wanted to have more ‘freedom’ from their *aiga*. For example,

*At first I was scared to leave my aunty’s place...  
but I just could not stay there any more...  
[...] very strict...I know she is doing her duty...  
but I’m 28 [years old] now...she never let go  
anywhere...only work, church, au faipese[choir  
practice] and no where else unless I’m with  
her or one of my cousins.*

(“Jo” SBS Group B)

*When I first came here I stayed with my uncle A,  
I didn’t like it...so I told uncle B...so he let me  
stay with him I liked it ...but I wanted to go  
flatting...and I asked my uncle B and he said OK...  
I think because his four kids also went flatting...  
I am very close to my uncle B and do all ‘his’  
fa’alavelave*

(“Sione” SBS Group B)

The majority of the NZB participants in Group A and in Group B, stated that they had or have left home at some stage, and it was because they wanted some independence and to become more self-reliant, and as a result their commitment towards their *aiga* increased.

Freedom to socialise outside ‘traditional’ spheres such as the church activities and youth groups was also discussed in length. That is, the freedom to go to bars, nightclubs, parties or just ‘hanging out’ with their friends without scrutiny from members of the community. Many of the NZB participants in Group A stated that this was unheard of during their formative ‘rebel’ years, but is now becoming more a trend that is gaining more acceptance and just part of ‘growing up.’ However, for the majority of SBS participants in Group B, especially the females, their presence in these new social venues is double edged. To be ‘seen’ or ‘rumoured’ to go to such ‘new’ social clubs are labelled *fia palagi*. For the female NZB respondents in Group B, who went to these social venues, they did not suffer the same scrutiny. It would seem that exposure to Western customs is only acceptable to the New Zealand born Samoans, a point of view shared by many SBS participants in Group B. Furthermore, much of the disapproval come from the older Samoan migrants, the ‘establishment’<sup>6</sup> who possess great influence within the Samoan community but are also seen as the source of great irritation for many of the younger migrants. Many of the younger Samoan migrants felt that the ‘establishment’ continued to view them and treated them as young kids in Samoa.

This diversity within the Samoan community reflects a change of the times within the Samoan community and mainstream society. This is evident between and within the two cohorts. For both the SBS and NZB participants in Group A their experiences and attitudes are not only significant in their lifestyles

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<sup>6</sup> “establishment” my own reference – during much of the discussion groups and the interviews conducted with SBS participants in Group B, view the older Samoan migrants as “oldies” or the “old lot” to identify them in this context, I referred to them as the “establishment.”

and in their attitudes towards their families and *fa'aSamoa*. Moreover, these experiences, lifestyles and attitudes were not the same for many SBS and NZB participants in Group B. As a result, attitudes towards the *aiga* and *fa'aSamoa* have differentiated between the two cohorts, but have also illustrated the diversity within the each cohort; furthermore, the New Zealand social climate has contributed to the development of the Samoan community and influenced the Samoan psyche and *fa'aSamoa* (Hendriske 1995:1). For all the participants in this investigation the Christchurch setting has affected how they fit into their 'new' home.

### **3. Role of Samoan women**

Cultural practices and social institutions, religion and the family are powerful forces in the shaping women's lives (Smith 1995:5). Traditionally, Samoan women have enjoyed a special status in Samoan society, the *feagaiga* (the covenant), which recognises the relationship between a woman and her brothers. The introduction of Christianity and Christian values and morals has contributed towards the role of Samoan women so that they mirrored their European counterparts (Meleisea 1987a: 67). These Western ideals have become more evident as the number of Samoan women in the labour force have altered and challenged the traditional gender roles. As the number of Samoan women, begin to assert their presence outside the home, in the workplace, within the Church and within the Samoan community as well as within the community at

large. For many of the female SBS participants in both Group A and in Group B, the decision to work is dependent on an economic necessity and later a sense of independence. As these two women illustrate,

*Yes of course I work...those days we[women] had to work because too many fa'alavelave and plus for the kids schooling...and send the money back home...and then try to pay the bills and do the shopping...those days were very hard*

(“Isa” SBS Group A)

*My husband and I try to think what is the best way... for the kids, their schooling...bills, food, church, our aiga in Samoa he work daytime and I work the night shift...this is the way we live and survive in New Zealand*

(“Nina” SBS Group B)

These excerpts highlight the major reasons why nearly all the women SBS participants entered the work force. To feed their family and to send money to their families in Samoa, as this was part of their ‘duty’ to their *aiga*.

Many of the NZB participants in Group A recalled images of their ‘working mothers’ and gave accounts of their mother’s absence in the home. Nearly all of the NZB participants, especially the females stated that the domestic duties and care of their younger siblings were part of their responsibilities. The majority of the female participants, both in Group A and Group B stated their home life centred on the domestic responsibilities of taking care of younger siblings, cooking, cleaning and taking on board the responsibilities the *palagi* define as the mother’s role. For example,

*After school, I had to look after my younger sisters... clean the house...get things ready for tea...bring the*

*washing in and fold it...we were not allowed to play*  
 (“Val” NZB Group B)

These images of ‘mothers’ in the work force have left many of the female participants of this investigation with strong impressions of the role of women and their own involvement. A large proportion of the Samoan women interviewed are currently in employment and have strong views about working for themselves. It is a form of independence and a way to participate in the various *fa’alavelave* that occur. The NZB participants in both in Group A and Group B view their mother’s decision to work as one of the many sacrifices of being a ‘Samoan woman and an immigrant’ and view their mother’s efforts her efforts as a great source of inspiration and pride.

One significant difference between the NZB women and SBS women participants is their attitude towards work and their choice to be a working mother. As mentioned above, the majority of the SBS female participants’ decision to work centred on economic necessity, this was not necessarily the same for the NZB female participants. Many of the NZB female respondents stated that their decision to work centred on the desire to earn one’s own money and the desire to pursue a career. For instance,

*Well [...] and I make a good living as we both  
 have reasonable jobs but I suppose if we had  
 to we could survive on [...] wage but I choose  
 to work because I look at it with my wage, we can  
 provide the kids with ‘extras’ ...and not to mention  
 both our family fa’alavelave ...also I have  
 worked really hard to get where I am...I think it  
 should be up to the women if she wants to work or not.*  
 (“Rosie” NZB Group A)

The majority of the Samoan women, especially among the SBS respondents in this study, suggest that as 'workers' they have been able to contribute and now have an influential part within the Samoan community. For many it is their contribution to their families, church and communities that have taken them out of the traditional spheres and into areas normally perceived as male circles more acceptable. The majority of the SBS women participants stated that they have taken active roles in the Women Group in their respected churches and are advocates for issues that affect the Samoan community such as education, health and housing. Furthermore, many of the female respondents in both Group A and Group B stated that as working women the opportunity to take on more challenging roles not only within the workplace but also as a career move for themselves. Opportunities such as supervisors and union representatives within the workplace as well as furthering their own development such as going to study at Polytechnics, or at other tertiary institutions such as University or Teachers College.

The presence of Samoan women in the workforce have paved the way for many to consolidate and extend their influence within the Samoan community but also it has permitted a redefining of the role of Samoan women, both island and New Zealand born Samoans. Although the real challenges for Samoan women is within the church arena (discussed later) it is suffice to say, Samoan women in the workplace have contributed to the change of what the role of Samoan women is. The role of the Samoan woman may have changed through employment despite initially, only out of economic necessity but it has enabled many acquire personal

autonomy and a ‘voice’ within the Samoan community and within the wider community.

**c) *Fa’alavelave: its impact and significance***

In the context of *aiga*, *fa’alavelave* is normally associated with ‘life-cycle event’ such as a wedding, funeral or the conferring of a *matai* title, the opening of a new public buildings or church. The function of the *fa’alavelave* is to demonstrate and reinforce kinship ties and where the Samoan ‘ceremonial exchange practices’ are performed (Meleisea & Schoffel 1998:169). Moreover, Va’a (2001: 210ff) states that a major factor to membership ties and the extensive gift giving, either in the form of remittances to dependents in Samoa, or participate in the social networks that ritually observe the life-cycle events, are all examples of *fa’alavelave*. *Fa’alavelave* relies heavily on commitment from each member of an *aiga* to contribute towards what the event may be, either in New Zealand or within the *aiga* in Samoa (Anae 1998:180). This section aims to highlight the significance and impact of *fa’alavelave*.

**1. Significance of *fa’alavelave***

On a spiritual and emotional level *fa’alavelave* symbolises reflects what ‘being Samoan’ is. It is a ‘living’ expression of one’s *tautua* (service) to one’s

*aiga, matai*, village and church. It is the physical ‘giving’ that is not only a strong part of Samoan culture but also a ‘living’ expression of one’s love and generosity.

Migration did not deter the Samoans’ devotion towards or adherence to the social norms or the rituals in maintaining the concept of *fa’alavelave*. Many of the SBS participants stated that they were proud of their continued commitment and *tautua* (service) to their *aiga*, and it is all part of the totality of *fa’aSamoa* and the essence of being ‘Samoan.’ According to Pitt & Macpherson, the Samoans’ participation and commitment in kin-based activities lie at the centre of what *fa’alavelave* is (Pitt & Macpherson 1974: 48). Thus, the function of *fa’alavelave* is to demonstrate and reinforce kinship ties.

One distinguishing factor to emerge in this section was illustrated and differentiated not only between and within the two cohorts but also the commitment to, and the relevance of, and future of the respondent’s participation in the *fa’alavelave* of one’s *aiga* or to one’s church. The most vocal and committed were all the SBS participants in Group A, the following is a typical response,

*Fa’alavelave is part of the life of a Samoan...  
every one has fa’alavelave ...our life is  
fa’alavelave ...if something happen to me and  
wife and our kids, who is going to help us...  
only your family.*

(“Zach” SBS Group A)

All the SBS participants in Group A expressed negative opinions of those Samoans who choose to not actively participate in *fa’alavelave* that these Samoans have severed all ties towards *fa’aSamoa* and the ‘life of a Samoan’ (“Zach” SBS Group A). For the majority of the SBS participants in Group B

*fa'alavelave* meant, having to contribute and “doing jobs” such as household cooking, greeting guests, doing the *umu* (cooking pigs, taro etc). While many of these SBS participants remit money and other material goods to the *fa'alavelave* of their *aiga* in Samoa, they are still required to contribute to the *fa'alavelave* that arise within the *aiga* in Christchurch or in New Zealand. This is evident among the SBS respondents in Group B and has led to some resenting the ‘establishment,’ within their own *aiga* and but also within the Church. For instance,

*Of course I give to fa'alavelave but sometimes its too much...also life here in New Zealand is different... more bills and you pay for everything here, not like Samoa...but when Samoa ring I send the money... its very hard...but I'm happy*  
 (“Nina” SBS Group B)

*Sometimes its very hard to give all the time... because here there are too many fa'alavelave ... my aiga, my husband's aiga in Christchurch... New Zealand...then there are the fa'alavelave at church...sometimes its too much*  
 (“Sofia” SBS Group B)

Among the NZB participants in both Group A and Group B their attitude to, and commitment to, and participation in the *fa'alavelave* of their *aiga*, village and church tends to differentiate depending on age. That is, with maturity and understanding comes a sense of acceptance and willingness to partake and learn more of *fa'aSamoa*. For instance,

*fa'alavelave made me so angry...I use to say to Mum want, want, want that's all they [Samoa] want and we suffer because all you do is give, give, give...poor Mum, I cringe now looking back but*

*I suppose that's natural...NOW with age, I understand it a bit better and I give on behalf of my parents...but more so, because it makes me feel good to give.*

(“Loma” NZB Group A)

*In terms of ‘wanting things’ for yourself, I’m trained now to ‘work around’ it now...and because Mum and Dad are semi-retired now they rely heavily on us kids to provide the financial support...but I participate ‘willingly’*

(“Tai” NZB Group B)

It is important to note that contribution towards or one’s participation in family *fa’alavelave* does not necessarily mean only financial assistance. For the majority of the NZB participants’ *fa’alavelave* also means

*Lots of cups of tea...lots of visitors coming in and out...no sleep...being broke...aunts and uncles bossing us around...you get to see cousins and relatives from Samoa or the ones in other parts of New Zealand...there are good and the bad aspects.*

(“Traci” NZB Group B)

The majority of NZB participants in both Group A and Group B and some SBS respondents in Group B recognise that the giving of either money or fine mats is significant, but just as important is donating time and effort. The most important thing is participation. All respondents echoed the importance of participation as it acknowledges the *va*.

## 2. Impact of *fa'avelave*

Within the New Zealand environment, the Samoans commitment to *fa'avelave* has increased in scale (Meleisea & Schoffel 1998:169) but also expanded to include not only one's *aiga*, *matai* and church in Christchurch, and throughout New Zealand but also in Samoa.

All the respondents interviewed state that they participate and contribute towards the *fa'avelave* of their *aiga*, physically, financially, and at times reluctantly. All the respondents in this study confess to the economic strains of *fa'avelave*, but this does not outweigh the emotional and spiritual obligations. For the majority of the NZB participants in both Group A and Group B confess the financial strain and time constraints are the major deterrence. Unlike their SBS counterpart, who felt the 'burden' and the pressure to fulfil one's obligations to the *aiga*, many of the NZB respondents stated conflict arose in trying to pursue their own personal goals and individual aspirations.

Participation and contribution towards *fa'avelave* is dependent on factors such as 'what' and to 'whom' the *fa'avelave* is for. For instance,

*Sometimes I give to the family fa'avelave  
but it depends on what its for and who's  
[member] fa'avelave is it...if it is  
for a fa'avelave of a matai oh no...that's  
what his kids are for.*

("Viv" SBS Group B)

For many of the SBS participants in Group A the level of commitment and participation in *fa'avelave*, have increased through new associations through work and to other members of the church and friends. The SBS participants in

Group B have limited their participation and involvement in affairs of the *aiga* in Christchurch; yet, are still committed to their *aiga* in Samoa. The limitation of one's participation among the SBS participants in Group B in the affairs of their extended *aiga* is an emerging trend. For many of them it is the financial strain it places couples with young families and the tensions within a family. In particular, tensions with younger members and members of the *aiga* who are part of the 'establishment.' As a result, some of the SBS participants in this study have changed churches and jobs, as Paulo explains,

*At church, there is too many of my family and  
fa'alavelave of the church, aiga and then the  
fa'alavelave of their wives [and husbands] and you  
have to give...same with my job.  
("Paulo" SBS Group B)*

From a different perspective, the decision to go to other churches or change one's place of employment opens new connections that one's *aiga* now is committed to through 'your' involvement and participation in.

It is hard to say if the level of commitment to *fa'alavelave* will be maintained once the early Samoan migrants of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s pass on or if the New Zealand born Samoan population and following generations will maintain this integral part of what has been defined as "being Samoan" is and a important element of the *fa'aSamoa*.

## d) Conclusion

The institution of the *aiga* still possesses much of its traditional significance and function. The *aiga* forms the identity for an individual and determines what 'being Samoan' is. From the outset, the early Samoan immigrants' utilised traditional institutions of form a sense of 'belonging' and familiarity became a mechanism that unified many of the Samoans in their new surroundings. The institution of the *aiga* in its Christchurch setting operates essentially as a nuclear unit, in terms of mindset and structure. Significant 'outside' influences such as education, wage economy, which has aided to the role of Samoan women and ideals of individualism have contributed to the changing dynamics within the institution of the *aiga*. This became apparent in the views expressed amidst the Samoan respondents of this investigation, both SBS and NZB Samoan participants. On one hand, these 'outside' influences have influenced and changed the structure of the *aiga*; while on the other hand, the concept of *aiga* has expanded to included one's own immediate and extended family but also incorporate members of the same village, district, church and city. That is, in the context of Samoans in New Zealand, the Samoan community in Christchurch also one *aiga*.

## Chapter 3: *Matai*

*There are no commoners in Samoa,  
only matai (chiefs & orators) and  
their suli (heirs)  
(Le Tagaloa 1991:118)*

This chapter examines the institution of the *matai* and the role of the *matai* within the Christchurch community. The objective of this chapter is to explain the significance of the *matai* and the role of how the *matai* impacts on the *fa'aSamoa* within the Samoan Christchurch community. It will look at how the institution of the “*matai*” and the “*fa'amatai (matai system)*” has evolved in definition and in function amidst the Christchurch community.

### a) ***Matai: Traditional significance & Impact of Western values.***

The word *matai* comes from *mata* (eye) and *iai* (toward) that allude to the concept of “looking toward” or “up to another”. A *matai* is an elected titleholder of his *aiga* and a member of the village *fono*. As a titleholder, a *matai* is connected to their village, through the title. The village is where the authority of the *matai*, his “seat” originates. It is the *matai's* “seat” through a complex framework of the *fa'aSamoa* and through the *matai* an “idea” of a centralised authority is formed (Meleisea 1988:8,9) It is through the *matai* as part of an elaborate system that connects all Samoans to their spiritual and cultural heritage.

Thus, all “seats” of authority have already appointed a particular rank. This is hinted in the expression: *O Samoa ua uma ona tofi – the institutions of Samoa have been appointed* (Meleisea 1992:14; Vaai 1999:29).

There are two distinctive categories of *matai*, the *ali'i* (sacred/sitting chiefs) and the *tulafale* (orators or talking chiefs). An *ali'i* is a titleholder, who has a sacred origin that originates from the ancient gods. The *tulafale* is the executive voice of the *ali'i*, and carries out the work of chieftainship (Goldman 1970: 268). Moreover, the *ali'i* and *tulafale* are interdependent but should be viewed as complementary because of the relationship between the two (Vaai 1999:36). There are elements such as “status, rank and title binding them [both] into the essential mutual dependence between form and function” (Goldman 1970: 268). This complementary element not only defines how each chiefly category functions but it also allows rivalry to exist between the two categories of *matai*.

As an elected representative of the *aiga* the *matai* is able to sit in the village council and represent their *aiga*. As trustees of any land or possessions of the *aiga* the *matai* must ensure that access to and the proceeds from the *aiga* resources are distributed among all members of the *aiga*. The *matai* is bestowed status and authority on them, but the incumbent must rely on the consensus and the continued support of the *aiga* for this. As the novelist Robert Louis Stevenson (1911: 3-4) writes,

*the matai hereditary he is; born of a great family,  
he must always be a man of mark; but yet his office  
is elective and held on good behaviour...the Samoan  
chief, if he be popular, wields a great influence; but*

*it is limited.*

*Matai* not only originate from divine origins and the enforcers of cultural norms but the *matai* also have practical and social obligations. Much of the scholarly research on the *matai* focuses on themes of status and rank; however, with status and leadership a *matai* must always conduct himself/herself according to his/her station within the *fa'aSamoa*. Mead illustrates this in her account with a young 27 year old chief,

*I have been a chief only four years and look, my hair is grey, although in Samoa grey hair comes very slowly, not in youth, ...but always, I must act as if I were old... walk gravely...I may not dance... neither may I play games with the young men. Old men of 60 are my companions...31 people live in my household. For them I must plan, I must find them food and clothing, settle their disputes, arrange their marriages. There is no one in my family who dares to scold me or even to address me familiarly by my first name, it is hard to be so young and yet to be a chief. And the old men shake their heads and agree that it is unseemly for one to be a chief so young.*

(Mead 1969: 36)

This excerpt illustrates the responsibilities of what “being a *matai* is” and how being a “separate entity” needs is to be upheld at all times.

The impact of Western ideals on the institution of the *matai* initiated changes that altered the traditional role and authority of the *matai*. One of the major developments was the Land & Titles Court 1903. It aimed at incorporating aspects of Samoan culture that did not conflict with the “rational-legal” principles

of the German Administration. However, the “writing down of titles” consequently cemented the status and rank of chiefly titles, thus, restricting the fluidity of the power and authority of *matai* within the *fa’aSamoa*. In spite of this, the Samoans firmly believe their own traditions, customs and the *fa’aSamoa* to be the only basis of legitimacy in government.

The criteria involved in succession to a title depended on the candidates’ personal attributes and ability to get approval from other members of the *aiga*. This “criteria” became comprised once Western influence and values was introduced, It provided new opportunities and opened up new ways for many to acquire a *matai* title; in particular, those who did not possess the traditional *aiga* based prerequisites such as commoners, women and *afakasi* (Kallen 1982:35-36). This “shift from old to new ethnicity” paved the way for a new standard in the selection process; for instance, the shift from a subsistence economy to cash cropping became an important aspect in a *matai*’s ability to the *aiga fa’alavelave*. It would soon become a primary qualification for the acquisition of *matai* status and titles (Kallen 1982:36ff). For many young Samoans the need for and pursuit for financial security led many to New Zealand, the land of milk and honey. The desire and commitment of the Samoan migrants set about building their new lives in Christchurch, and for many to maintain the *fa’aSamoa* meant the institution of the *matai* would be recreated.

## b) *Matai* – new definitions

### 1. What is a *matai*?

The most important finding of this examination, in regards to the *matai* is the “perception” of what a *matai* is. The “perception” of what a *matai* is impacts on how many of the respondents view the role and significance of the *matai*. Nearly all the SBS participants in Group A and Group B define the *matai* according to and state the importance of the *matai* from a traditional standpoint and that the institution of the *matai* is a pivotal part of the *fa’aSamoa*. The majority of the NZB participants in both Group A and Group B translated the *matai* to simply mean “chief,” which is interpreted and referred to as headman or an autocrat. Furthermore, the NZB respondents possessed distinctive definitions of what the *matai*’s functions are and the how significant the *matai* is in the Christchurch community. It is important to note, that due to the sensitivity of the issue much of the discussion was conducted in the third person or discussed in general terms, in an effort not to offend the *matai* being interviewed and the participants to whom their father/mother is a *matai*.

Nearly all the NZB participants in Group A stated that they understood the significance of the *matai*, but the majority of the NZB participants are apprehensive of every becoming a *matai*. For many of these participants it something to aspire to but also something to fear for different reasons; for

instance, here are two examples of NZB participants in Group A, who are *matai* and have different perspectives and agendas,

*I never use my matai name...only the matai of my family ever call me [...]  
I don't think people here know...since I was the only one left...after Dad died his family really wanted me to matai... I am embarrassed when people know because my fa'aSamoa is really bad... and I wouldn't know what to say.*  
(“Mele” NZB Group A)

*At first I was petrified...couldn't speak a word of Samoan...the ceremony was just as bad...I realised during my saofai that I was getting this great gift and I couldn't understand any of it...that's when I decided I was going to learn...now I just can't get enough...one of the important lessons is if you don't have the heart to be a matai ...the good and bad...then you will get nothing.*  
(“KC” NZB Group A)

Both respondents acquired their *matai* at the passing away of both of their fathers. For both respondents their title is “token” of gratitude of each of their respective *aiga*. It is interesting that “Mele’s” insecurities are fuelled by her lack of knowledge in the *fa'aSamoa*, whereas “KC” eagerness to learn fuels his sense of responsibility towards his *aiga* and to the Samoan people.

The majority of the NZB respondents in Group B stated that the *matai* and the institution of the *matai* is all “part of the *fa'aSamoa*.” The majority of the NZB participants stated that their fathers are *matai* so there was a general understanding of the responsibilities and “strains” that come with having a father/mother who is a *matai*. In stark contrast, the “perception” of the *matai* and

its significance and function came under great scrutiny for some of the NZB respondents, whose father/mother are not *matai*. Most of these NZB respondents are in Group B and two excerpts below illustrate the general attitude of these respondents,

*Matai are a waste of time...they are just 'glory hounds' and all they want is to have us give to and do what they want.*

(“Lei” NZB Group B)

*Its hard to see the purpose of the matai in New Zealand...its not like any of us [NZB] will ever be one...the matai in our family are always making decisions...none of us [parents] have a say.*

(“Traci” NZB Group B)

In contrast, the following is typical of those NZB respondents in Group B whose parent is a *matai*,

*My dad's matai is from [...] since his matai it has changed a lot...a lot more fa'alavelave...more pressure on us kids to contribute...to behave and conform... go to church and participate in church activities...it has made us try to learn and understand more about fa'aSamoa but its definitely not glamorous.*

(“Edna” NZB Group B)

It becomes increasingly apparent that the “perception” of the *matai* and to a certain degree, one’s participation in *fa'alavelave* or viewpoint on the “*fa'aSamoa*” relies heavily on personal experiences and sacrifices, among the NZB respondents in this study. Interestingly, this is not the case among the SBS participants in this investigation regardless of having a parent who is a *matai* or not.

All the SBS participants in this study defined the *matai* as a titled person that “possesses the *paia ma le mamalu*” of Samoa. Therefore, a *matai* should be worthy of a title and always conduct himself/herself accordingly. For some of the SBS respondents the *matai* is a reflection of what the *fa’aSamoa* is. However, there have also been several concerns, which some of the SBS respondents illustrate here,

*Some of the matai here...make me ma  
[embarrassed] they are holding and carrying  
the ‘paia ma le mamalu’ o Samoa...many  
lack the wisdom, training and the guts...  
they don’t know how to do a lauga [speech]  
all they do is say their matai[title] but  
they don’t know anything...they don’t  
know the history, or the ‘real’ fa’aSamoa  
I don’t know why they matai.*

(“Isa” SBS Group A)

*I tell you...gone are days when matai were  
good and good amio (behaviour) ...now they  
drink, gamble and fight at pubs...some don’t  
go to church...don’t look after the family...  
all they want to do is talk...but know nothing.*

(“Pepe” SBS Group A)

Much of these concerns centre on the behaviour of some *matai* and lack of “training” and appreciation for what the institution of *matai* represents. One reason for this is that the *matai* in Christchurch do not have to worry about the scrutiny of a village council or the *aiga*, which much of the learning and grooming is done.

## 2. Succession & Motives.

Succession and the criteria to becoming a *matai* is a major concern among all the Samoan participants in this research. In this study there are eight SBS respondents who are *matai* in Group A, all eight SBS respondents came to New Zealand as *taule'ale'a* (untitled person/ “youths”) and all of them have acquired their *matai* while living in Christchurch; moreover, there is also two NZB respondents who are also *matai*. All of the SBS participants who are *matai* in Group A stated that the main reason behind their *matai* succession was due to their “service” to their *aiga*, or that the previous title holder had died.

The consensus of the “elders” of the *aiga* in Samoa is still warranted for a successful candidate to acquire a title. As this prominent *matai* explains,

*To be a matai is a very hard thing...first, one must be a good person...serve the family...and be some one that has a good amio [behaviour]...if a father wants his son to be a matai...the aiga must agree if they say no, then its no...but if the family is happy...then its OK...but the whole family must agree.*

(“Dave” SBS Group A)

Interestingly, the “whole family” refers to not only elders but also the members of the *aiga*, that is, all those that are in the same generation as the candidate. For example, if the incumbent to the *matai* title were to be your father, it would mean your father’s siblings and first cousins as well as all the elders such as aunts, uncles, and other *matai* of father’s family. Seniority, in *fa’aSamoa* is not only determined by age but also generational.

There are only two *matai* within the SBS participants in Group B, but the other SBS male respondents in Group alluded to the prospect of becoming a *matai* as “something to think about” and furthermore, indicated that they did “expect to become one”, but stated that there is “a lot of work to do first.” All the SBS participants in this investigation stated that to become a *matai* would mean to leave behind boyish attitudes, and be committed to the church, contribute to the *fa'alavelave* of the *aiga*, and be “known” and “treated seriously” by one’s *aiga*, church, and community.

References to be “known” is a concern that was voiced among several SBS *matai* in Group A, highlighting their concern that a lot of people (namely, prospective candidates) who want to be *matai* “nowadays” have spent a considerable time out of Samoa, or away from their village and who are ignorant of the protocol and “ways” of the *matai* within the “realm of the *matai* – *fa'amatai*.” It is interesting that these *matai* would have such concerns as many of them acquired their *matai* while living in New Zealand. However, their concerns focus on the lack of knowledge and training required for a *matai*, as the respective *matai* highlight,

*There are a lot of matai now who have gone to Samoa to do their saofai, but never lived in that village...or they don't know the history of that village...some of them have lived in Nui Sila and go back to be matai...bring their matai here but know nothing...because they have not been trained...or the worst thing...become a matai...and the people of that village don't know you.*

(“George” SBS Group A)

Although much of the discussion focused on the desire to “become a *matai*” it became obvious that the selection process still followed the “traditional” process and criteria. However, the motives behind wanting to become a *matai* were based on more personal objectives but also more driven because they were living in Christchurch. A dominant motive was that the “*matai*” was for their children’s future; especially, as the majority of the children were born in New Zealand and also if a *matai* has only or mainly daughters. For example,

*My family wanted me to be a matai a long time ago...but my wife said I was not ready...I went to Samoa and did my saofai last year...now life is very hard...especially the fa'alavelave...but I do my matai for my kids...I have four girls and one boy, he's the youngest...if my son wants a matai its easy but for my girls its very hard...and if they marry they don't have my name...but everyone will know who their father is and their village in Samoa.*

(“Robert” SBS Group B)

Another motive to emerge was the desire for social mobility, especially within the hierarchy of the church and among the Christchurch community. This has become more evident as the “establishment” are slowly dying and positions and opportunities are becoming available. Although it is not specifically stated that one needs to be a *matai* to hold a position – *tofi* within the church, it is apparent that within *fa'aSamoa* it is a prerequisite. In the cultural or ceremonial activities within or on behalf of the church it becomes evident that a non *matai* in a position of authority becomes very limited in their participation, especially in the realm of the *fa'aSamoa*. To participate or be able to conduct those responsibilities allocated to

you through your *tofi* effectively, being a *matai* is a perquisite. Palenapa (1993:65,66) argues, because the *matai* is the upholder of the *fa'aSamoa* and the deacon/elder within the church it is a natural position for the *matai*. Although the Christian church views everyone as equal, the reality is that titled deacons/elders will always take precedence over untitled deacons/elders. This is often the case in all the church activities that take place, the *matai* of the church make most of the administrative and cultural decisions.

Two major concerns emerged in the discussion with the NZB participants who highlighted the low number of female *matai* and how the *matai* is viewed as a birthright, more notably “their” birthright through “inheritance.” Nearly all the NZB female participants voiced concerns on the low number of female *matai* and how the “selection process” for Samoan women to be a *matai*, is either under special circumstances such as “Mele” or as an award or recognition of a great achievement. Many of the NZB participants interviewed expressed concerns over the inequality of the “system” but accepted it as part of the *fa'aSamoa*. Moreover, when women do become *matai* the majority of the titles conferred on women are *matai ali'i*. When asked why this was the case, this *matai* stated,

*It is not hard for a woman to be a matai  
but it is very hard for a woman to stand up  
and be part of the fa'atau [debate]...if a  
woman did stand up...and a matai told her  
to sit down...or some rude thing like go and  
look after your kids...she is ma...and her matai is  
down.*

(“Lance” SBS Group A)

The *matai* as a birthright seemed to be the general consensus among the majority of the NZB participants in Group B. The majority of the NZB participants in Group B expressed views and believed that the *matai* is “their” birthright, especially if their father is a *matai* and it should be appointed within their “own” immediate family. Unlike the NZB respondents in Group A, the younger participants express an eagerness to be a *matai* and viewed it something aspire to. Many of the younger NZB participants were unaware of the process and the “traditional” consensus needed from the *aiga* in Samoa first, before one is to be considered a *matai*. Many believed the title would be inherited once their father/mother passed away. This is reiterated by many of the NZB female participants in Group B, who stated that if the *matai* did not come to them it would go their sons. It becomes evident that if the perception of the *matai* is put within the Western concept of “chief” or “aristocrat” not only does this fuel misinterpretation, but the traditional significance of the *matai* is lost; however, the desire to be a *matai* becomes more attractive.

**b) *Matai* - function & influence.**

Traditionally, one of the roles the *matai* has is to act as the custodian of the family land and all property owned by the family. The *matai* must ensure access and distribute economic and financial resources obtained from the land and property among the members of the *aiga* (Grattan 1948:16). Although the absence of land and economic resources may have altered, it does not diminish the

significance or the role of the *matai* in New Zealand. Instead, the role of the *matai* in New Zealand has altered but also it has extended and taken on board new responsibilities.

### **1. *Matai* as “mediators” & “leaders”**

Tradition, justifies the *matai* as the “spokesperson” and the “leaders” of the Samoan community. Nowadays, and with reference to the Christchurch environment, the *matai* now “operate as representatives of tribal communities encapsulated within a metropolitan state” (Lindstrom & White 1997:2). It is this role of “representative” and that the *matai* is the appointed “voice” of the Samoan community which mainstream accept, in relation to any discussion regarding concerns affecting the Samoan community are discussed. Nearly all the SBS and NZB participants in Group A were apprehensive of the *matai* “ability” and “right” to speak on matters that affect them, individually and as a community. The lack of confidence centres on “which” *matai* is that is doing the talking, and on what issue is being discussed. For example, if a person (a *palagi*) wants to know about succession to become a *matai*, then it is acceptable for the *matai* being interviewed to answer generally, and offer examples of his/her own *aiga*. It is not acceptable for the *matai* to answer on behalf of another *aiga* or on matters concerning a church or a village if he is not a member or not his own. It is disrespectful and an issue of great annoyance, as one participant exclaimed,

*I don't tell matai of [...] how to conduct their  
business ...matai don't talk about the other*

*aiga...here [Christchurch] matai think they  
speak on behalf of 'all' Samoans.  
(“Tufi” SBS Group A)*

For many NZB participants in Group A the major concern is the ability of some *matai* to act as “the” representatives or spokesmen of the Samoan community. For example,

*I hate it when [...] stands up and say  
this and that to the palagi...and that is  
fa'aSamoa...a lot of it is wrong and  
geared up for his own benefit.  
(“Gina” NZB Group B)*

*I know palagi are being 'culturally sensitive'  
and take what certain matai to be 'fact' but  
there are other people in specific areas...  
church members...not only matai know what  
is best for Samoans.  
(“Miles” NZB Group A)*

The underlying theme here is that *matai* are representatives of their *aiga*, *nu'u* in Samoa but the Samoan community in Christchurch is made up of Samoans from different *aiga* and different villages; therefore, the Samoan community have different needs and aspirations, which *matai* may not be in the best position to advocate.

Nevertheless, the *matai* is still an effective “mediator” for and within the Samoan community in Christchurch, in particular, at times of conflict and run-ins with the law occur. Nearly all the participants shared experiences that involved *matai* (from their own *aiga*) acting on their behalf as intermediaries. As the following excerpts illustrate,

*Because my job is [...] I get to see most of the*

*Samoan offenders...even though they are embarrassed ...when they see me...I ask them... and they always answer...sometimes the family is there...usually a matai is there...as a matai...it is sometimes better to talk through him...because the parents [offenders] are upset, angry and very ma [embarrassed].*

(“Manu” SBS Group A)

*The quickest way to stop mesa [conflict] is a matai... if the mesa is in the aiga...only the can matai fix it...if mesa with another aiga...only the matai [yours] can go and talk to the matai [of that] aiga...if you go or someone else go who is not a matai...the aiga may just fasi [beat] and tuli [chase] you.*

(“Robert” SBS Group B)

## **2. Matai: “Organisers” & “Mobilisers”**

One of the fundamental functions of the *matai* is to “to discuss family affairs or any happenings affecting the interests of the family, or to discharge the duties associated with deaths or weddings” (Grattan 1948:10). This aspect of the role of the *matai* remains very important in the Christchurch setting; moreover, this aspect of the *matai* role has expanded, especially when mobilising funds or material goods to Samoa on special projects or fundraising events arise. The majority of all the participants in both Group A and Group B stated that the *matai* have an obligation to inform and gather all members of an *aiga* to discuss any family matters. For instance,

*When there is a fa’alavelave...the family all meet at uncle [...]home...depending on what the fa’alavelave is...all the members talk ...if there is an agreement then a amount or what each*

*person contributes is agreed upon ...and then it is discussed who goes to take the si'i (ceremonial offering) on behalf of the aiga ...*

(“Fred” NZB Group B)

*It is my job as the matai to tell the aiga[his] of any fa'alavelave that is in Samoa, Aukilani or anywhere because if I don't do this then someone may get angry or get ma [embarrassed] if the fa'alavelave is here, in Christchurch...if they do not want to come then it is up to them ...but they know.*

(“Olo” SBS Group A)

The ability of the *matai* to mobilise resources and labour within one's own *aiga* and extended *aiga* in New Zealand is still a major role of the *matai*. This role has also extended amidst the Samoan community, in this case the Samoan community in Christchurch, on large projects such as church openings, community activities and a village projects in Samoa.

The *matai* as the “head” of an *aiga* the *matai* is able to call upon members of the family to contribute to activities, or a *fa'alavelave* or special “fundraising” or support him or any member of the *aiga* through donations of cash, labour and goods. For instance, the opening of the newly constructed EFKS church in Woolston, Christchurch opened in 1998. The opening marked a major event for the members of the Samoan EFKS church but also it marked a special event for the Samoan community as a whole. People from all over the New Zealand, Samoa and Australia came to support their *aiga*. The new church raised nearly \$90,000 in donations and the various gifts from other churches. As one participant recounts the event,

*For that foufeilega [opening] ...each family had to put in*

*\$200... we don't go to that church...but a matai in our family goes to that church...each matafale put in \$200 towards the mealofa [gift] of the church too.*  
 ("Robert" SBS Group B)

*My uncle [...] goes to the EFKS ...the family had a meeting ...and decided that each family [matafale] put in \$100 for my uncle's ipu [cup] ...that wasn't so bad because there is a lot of my dad's family here.*  
 ("Traci" NZB Group B)

This type of networking and mobilising resources is also applied when major developments or events occur in Christchurch, New Zealand or in Samoa. In 2002, the *fono matai* of the village "L" petitioned to all "L" *matai*, to contribute towards the construction of a new highway, which would go through the village. The "L" *matai* residing in Christchurch set about raising funds for this project, for example,

*The first fono was in March...all the matai from the village met at [...] place...first, we were told the matai from "L" ask if we can help...we [matai] all agree to help...and then ask how and what needs to be done...then a meeting for next week is settle...the second meeting, is the following week...here all the aiga [14 matafale] and their matai[17] meet...the money needs to be collected and sent to the nu'u by October [2002]...several fundraising events (siva) were set up and every week a 'lafoga' [matai donation] of \$20.00 for all matai and every fortnight each aiga contributes \$100.00...and every one agrees to meet every fortnight...at the end of July, three matai from here went to "L" with our mealofa [gift] of \$38.000.*  
 ("Niu" SBS Group A)

The ability of the *matai* to mobilise capital and labour is what the majority of the participants interviewed quoted "just the *fa'aSamoa*" way.

**c) New Innovations.**

Innovations to the role of the *matai* within the Christchurch setting have been able to occur through necessity and opportunity. One place innovation has occurred and impact on the *fa'aSamoa* is the Church.

One is the *matai* “roster” system of the St Pauls Trinity Presbyterian Pacific Island Church (PIPC). This innovation is unique to St Pauls PIPC and the main objective of the roster system is to be fair and give every *matai* in the congregation a share of the responsibilities pertaining to church affairs. It is designed to cater for the large number of *matai* within the church, who are from different villages, regardless of their rank. All *matai* are placed on a roster, and when it is the *matai's masiga* (month/ monthly duty) it is their duty to perform all the cultural obligations that may occur during that month, on behalf of the church. The “roster” system avoids issues such as “hierarchy” and allows each *matai* to take assert himself/herself within the church. Although it is not “good practice” to talk badly about another church, and the author is aware of this, but in the context of thesis some respondents did point out the pitfalls of such a system. For instance,

*Well that's the way of the PIPC...and its been like that for a long time...but sometimes it does not fataui (fit)... for example, if there is a wedding...and is done the fa'aSamoa way...if the matai [masiga] is from the same nu'u, or aiga to the bride's family...or the groom's family...and that matai speaks on behalf of the church to matai of his own nu'u or aiga*

*that is not the right...that's not fa'aSamoa...it is very mataga (bad/an embarrassment )*  
 (“Olo” SBS GroupA)

Although the “roster” system may contradict the norms of the *fa'aSamoa* these innovations are implemented by the consensus of the minister and congregation and are accepted by other church denominations as “St Pauls PIPC way.”

The fluidity of the *fa'aSamoa* enables and encourages innovation and in the Christchurch environment it allows non *matai* or *matai* of lesser rank to enter into new areas that would traditionally be out of zone. As mentioned earlier, the introduction of non *matai* in position within the church, which would be very unlikely in Samoa is able to condoned in the Christchurch setting. Furthermore, the opportunity for a smart ambitious *matai* to outwit and gain social mobility is also permitted. The author recalls an episode during an *ava* ceremony that caused, at the time quite a sensation that was to reach Samoa,

*The [...] church was welcoming of a very high chief, he was 'brought' by another high chief, traditionally, it is the tulafale that provides the lauga [speech] ...but before he delivers it, and according to protocol he gives must fa'aaloalo to the matai ali'i sitting there. When he did this, the young matai ali'i took his opportunity, by accepting the fa'aaloalo of the tulafale, who was in shock, knew the tulafale could not reclaim it, in turn offered his fa'aaloalo to the other surprised ali'i sitting there to do the lauga, they declined so the young matai ali'i did the lauga.*

To this day, the event is still talked about and since then the opportunity for a *matai* – *ali'i*, who is ambitious and *poto* (smart) to perform certain “responsibilities” traditionally performed by the *tulafale*; moreover, this also applies to lesser rank *matai* being able to outsmart higher rank *matai*.

## Conclusion

The institution of the *matai* is an integral part of the *fa'aSamoa* among the Christchurch community. The role of the *matai* as a leader, spokesman of the *aiga, nu'u* or church have not changed drastically from Samoa, and are still performed among the *matai* in Christchurch. Instead, the *matai* is able to extend his influence into areas such as the Court system, and in government agencies. The perception of what a *matai* is has brought misinterpretation, lack of understanding but also an “elite – ness” about the *matai* and the desire to become one. The ability of the *matai* to mobilise cash and labour for church, village and family projects illustrates the influence the *matai* and the consensus and the commitment a large number of Samoans to stay committed to the *fa'aSamoa*.

## Chapter 4: Church.

*The church is still the force behind the teaching of the language, customs and traditions, in a fanua where a Samoan can stand tall and feel dignified in exercising his cultural and religious practices without being looked upon as a stranger while doing what is right in accordance with his fa'aSamoa.*

*(Ngan-Woo 1985:9)*

This chapter looks at how the institution of the Christian church and the role of the Church impacts as well as contributes to the evolution of the *fa'aSamoa*. In this chapter one will look at how the “traditional” church(es) in Samoa became established, and how this is re-enacted in the Christchurch and how the role of the *faiifeau* (minister/pastor) has impacted on the evolution of the *fa'aSamoa*.

### a) Traditional Church in Samoa.

Samoa's conversion to Christianity is evident in the large number of churches that can be found throughout the Samoan Islands. The arrival of the Christian missions in Samoa, as Davidson (1967:31) remarks, “marked the end of an age.” The Samoans would no longer be judged in terms of their indigenous tradition or within their framework of the ancient political structure; instead, the

new faith converted the “heathen natives” into a more civilised society according to Christian values.

Christianity was presented to the Samoans as the start of the *aso malamalama* (spiritual enlightenment) and the end of the *aso pouliuli* (spiritual darkness). The arrival of Christianity to Samoa is commemorated in three “*taeao* - Dawns.” Reference to these *taeao* (dawn) is of great significance in Samoa’s history and tells the arrival of three Christian missions to Samoa - the “Dawns of the Gospel” (Fido 1995:20). The *taeao* of *mataniu feagai ma le Ata* refers to the arrival of the missionaries of the London Mission Society at Sapapali’i. The *taeao* at *faleu ma Utuaniani* refers to the arrival of the Wesleyan Church at Manono; and lastly, the *taeao* at *malae ola ma gafoaga* refers to the arrival of the Roman Catholic Church at Lealatele. The arrival of other Christian missions such as the Seven Day Adventist and Latter Day Saints in Samoa are not accorded the same historical significance as the initial three (Fido 1995:20) and this proves to be significant in the future.

### **1. Conversion.**

Samoa’s successful conversion to Christianity is attributed to several factors. The fulfilment of *Nafanua* (goddess of war) prophecy to Malietoa Fitiseanu (Fido 1995:18-19). The timely arrival of the *Messenger of Peace*, carrying John Williams and Charles Barff and eight teachers from Tahiti, which coincided with the death of the *Tamafaiga*. *Tamafaiga*, an opponent of Malietoa Vai’inupu and it is believed that if he was still alive would have been considered

an obstacle to Samoa's conversion to Christianity (Moyle 1984:69). Furthermore, the Samoans believed that by converting to this new "God" they also would be able to obtain European materials and access to the European superior technology.

For instance, a Samoan chief explains at the arrival of John Williams,

*Worshippers of Jehovah...their persons are covered from head to foot in beautiful clothes...their axes are so hard and sharp...their knives, too...what valuable things they are...now I conclude that the God who has given to His white worshippers these valuable things must be wiser than our gods...we want these articles...that the God who gave them should be our God.*

(Keesing 1934: 396)

Although access to the material wealth of the Christian god may have been one objective of the Samoans to convert to Christianity, the Christian missions' approach and adoption of the indigenous idiom – *fa'aSamoa* allowed conversion to be rapid and widespread (Tuimauluga 1977:iii).

Generally, all the Christian missions utilised similar methods of conversion. Although much of the data concentrates largely on the London Missionary Society (LMS), it is suffice to say that the methods used by the Roman Catholic Church (RC) and the Wesleyan Church (LT) followed the same pattern. Samoa's conversion to Christianity saw the introduction of Western goods, and Western education, as well as new rituals and forms of discipline and worship.

The emergence of education institutions came about with the introduction of rudimentary reading and writing of the Scriptures. This paved the way for the Christian missions to make headway into the villages. Once the villages converted

and accepted the new faith the building of Christian Churches soon appeared throughout Samoa. These village churches became the school classrooms, and soon schools for students at higher grade were being built. Promising Samoan candidates from the pastor schools in the villages, were taken in by the missionaries and these students were taught the English language, Scriptures, arithmetic, geography as well as agricultural methods (Davidson 1967:35; Gilson 1970:95; Ta'aese 1995:147). Soon educational institutions such as Malua Theological College established in 1844, which Samoan graduates become the future ministers. Girls were also given the same preference in education and the Papauta Girls College established in 1891, soon began graduating its pupils with the tools to become good teachers and good Christian mothers (Meleisea 1987a: 60; Ta'aese 1995:149).

## **2. Establishment of Village Churches & Ministry.**

Due to the increasing number of converts and the Samoans reluctance to congregate and worship outside their own villages, the Christian missions soon established "stations" in the rural villages. Initially, this platform enabled the Christian missions to maintain authority and influence and instil the Christian doctrine and Western values such as their education programmes (Allen 1990:24). However, as time went on the number of converts increased and much of the Ministry's work was placed in the hands of the Samoan teachers. Davidson (1967:36) argues, that one of the contributing factors towards a "Samoanised"

version of Christianity was the introduction and training of Samoan teachers as pastors. It was these new recruits, who later as became *faiifeau* were placed into the villages to continued the work of the missions; and in turn made the “village churches became sensitive to traditional authority” (Davidson 1967:36; Gilson 1970:92,97ff; *on church models see* Ta’aese 1995: chapter 5).

The introduction of the Samoan *faiifeau* and the establishment of village churches under the control of the village *fono* (council) are two major features that have influenced the distinctive character of the institution of the church, in Samoa. The establishment of the village churches can largely be attributed to “Samoa’s powerful and resilient social structure” (Garrett 1982:123,277) and the Samoans’ confidence and determination to do things “their” way. Furthermore, the village churches, and the village pastoral ministry of the church soon became reliant upon and embedded into “Samoa’s system of cultural authority.” As Ioka states, the historical evolution of the Samoan village church and the Christian Gospel was able to sink deep into and become interwoven in all aspects of the *fa’aSamoa* (Ioka 1998:38). Keesing (1934:405) argues, that the LMS “developed a remarkably complete system based more or less on the old political divisions of Samoan life.” Although the role of the *faiifeau* is discussed in detail later, it is suffice to say that the introduction of the *faiifeau*, eventually lead to Samoan autonomy in the church.

Samoa’s social hierarchical features allowed Christianity to flourish and integrate with ease into the *fa’aSamoa* because unlike other Polynesian societies, the Samoans did not possess a specific priesthood. The *matai* conducted much of

the religious offerings and rituals. As Freeman argues, there were five main classes of god – the god of the individual, the family god, the village god, and the district god and the war god – in addition to certain major gods like Tagaloa-a-lagi, and various minor gods. However, every family, village, and district had its own god and the *matai* acted as the family’s intermediary with their family god (Freeman in Hempenstall 2004:245). The Samoans did not construct temples, instead each village possessed a sacred *malae* (sacred piece of earth) where a shaman, normally a titled chief dwelled and who was believed to be the incarnation of a god. One of the functions of the shaman was to appoint feast days in honour of the village god. The introduction of the *faiifeau* into the Samoan hinterland only ensured the dominance of the *fa’aSamoa* but also through the institution of the *faiifeau* and “Samoanisation” of the Christian church.

The *faiifeau* became synonymous with and interpreted as the *sui o le Atua* – God’s representative, and was to be treated and revered in the manner of a *matai*. It is believed that the *faiifeau* now possessed the similar spirit powers once belonged to the shaman of the primitive gods. Freeman highlights, that the Samoan traditions and rituals practiced towards their ancient gods such as presenting food and property to the ancient gods was now transferred to the god Jehovah, and the impact of new material goods soon evolved material culture (Freeman in Hempenstall 2004:246).

As the village ministries were starting to establish themselves, it gradually the leadership and authority of the church came under Samoan authority. Soon the structure of the Christian church came to mirror the Samoan social and political

institutions. The integration of the *faiifeau* into the village social structure and soon the *faiifeau* became just as distinctive among the *matai* of the village. He was,

*surrounded by his council of influential lay deacons... took the place of the priests and prophets of ancient Samoan religion as mediators with the unseen world. They were given good houses, inferior only to those of the highest chiefs in each village. They were honoured as men of God; in exchange for their preaching and conduct of worship they received traditional gifts – food, fine mats, cloth-on an impressive scale... They renounced matai status, but exercised special power of their own because of their spiritual authority and social position. They had to be called to a village church, but once there were revered.*

(Garrett 1982:124)

The appointment of a *faiifeau* to a village is chosen by the village *fono*. The successful candidate must be a graduate of either the London Mission Society's Theological seminary such as Malua or Piula. The newly appointed *faiifeau* is clothed, feed and cared for and provided a house by the village, therefore, his position relies on the village (Freeman cited in Hempenstall 2004: 249). The *matai* became deacons, which ensured members of his household and *aiga potopoto* living in the village become members of the congregation.

By 1900 the LMS Church flourished throughout Samoa. It not only cemented its relationship within the Samoan hinterland but the hierarchical structure of the Church soon resembled the structure of Samoan society. At the local level the LMS churches established themselves in the villages, through the introduction of the *faiifeau* and the *feagaiga* between village and the *faiifeau*. At a higher level the establishment of a governing body for the church as a whole. The

*fono tele* (national meeting) consisted of a committee of elder ministers, the *au toeaina* (committee of elders) was established in 1907, these elders came from and represented the various Samoan districts and gathered for the purpose of discussing and making decisions for the betterment of the institution of the Church. Although the Christian missions obtained their main objective, which was to convert the Samoans to Christianity; however, in achieving this goal the Christian missions' methods only accomplished a Samoanised version of their faith.

#### b) Institution of the Church in New Zealand.

When the early Samoan migrants arrived in New Zealand they found themselves in a new environment, among people who possessed worldviews, lifestyles, traditions and beliefs different from their own. One of the few commonalities these early Samoan migrants had with their hosts was that they were Christians. From the outset, the Church provided not only spiritual guidance and solace but also the Church provided a safe and comfortable haven. It was a place where these early Samoan migrants could conduct and maintain their “cultural” traditions (Ngan-Woo 1985:32-33).

The establishment of the Samoan Christian Churches in New Zealand was designed to not only congregate and worship but also for the conducting their affairs according to, maintaining and the promotion of the *fa'aSamoa*. The Samoan migrant churches took on a distinctive character. It developed under

different social and economic environment. These migrant churches did not have the village council or have a *matai* or *aiga* to pressure an individual to attend church, attendance is voluntary (Pitt & Macpherson 1974:51). This section aims to examine how the Samoan churches developed in its Christchurch setting and how this has maintained the *fa'aSamoa*.

### **1. Background to the Christchurch Churches.**

For the small Samoan migrant community living in Christchurch the Church provided one of the few meeting places for Samoans to congregate and conduct themselves according to the *fa'aSamoa* outside the home. According to Woolf (cited in Finn 1973:48), there were 458 Samoans living in Christchurch in 1966 therefore, the Church played a major role among the Christchurch community.

One of the biggest and oldest churches in Christchurch is St. Pauls Trinity Pacific Presbyterian Church (PIPC). St. Pauls (PIPC) came about from the official union between the Congregational Union of New Zealand and the Presbyterian Church in 1969, which saw the establishment of the Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church (PIC) (see Nokise 1978). The merger aimed at integrating and promoting Pacific cultures in a more open multi-ethnic “Pacific” church (Taule’ale’usumai 2001:183). St. Pauls Trinity Pacific Presbyterian Church (PIPC) was formally established in 1969, as a result of a union between the Trinity Congregational Church (Worcester Street) and St. Pauls Presbyterian Church (Cashel Street). The

congregation is multi-cultural and consists of Europeans, Niueans, Cook Islands but the biggest ethnic group are the Samoans.

One of the objectives of St Pauls PIPC is to promote the diversity of the Pacific groups while uniting them under the banner of Christianity and catering to all the various ethnic groups within its congregation. Sunday Services starts with the morning service that is conducted in English, followed by afternoon services for the Cook Island, Niueans, and Samoan groups respectively. The Sunday School and Youth Group is conducted in English and is aimed at encouraging the young of all the ethnic groups to come together. Although many of the Samoan members encouraged their youth to join the *autalavou* (Youth Group), and this is open to all youth members of the church, in reality the *autalavou* caters more for the younger Samoan born youths and singletons. Within the Samoan group the *autalavou* have taken on the responsibilities, which mirror the traditional *aumga* and *aualuma*.

For many Samoan migrants the PIC did not provide the same “cultural” environment as the Congregational Church in Samoa. The most significant split came in 1963 when members of the Auckland Pacific Islands Presbyterian Church broke away to establish a Samoan Church that would model its parent Church in Samoa (Nokise 1978:216-244). The first Congregational Church of Samoa (CCS) in New Zealand was formed in 1963 in Auckland, and later on the 17 April 1966 the Christchurch Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (EFKS)<sup>7</sup> (“Book of Remembrance” EFKS Christchurch) was established.

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<sup>7</sup> EFKS – *Ekalesia Fa’apotopotoga Kerisano o Samoa* – originally the LMS church, usually referred as “*Lotu Taiti*” (church from Tahiti), in New Zealand & Christchurch simply referred to as EFKS.

Like the Auckland CCS churches, the Christchurch EFKS mirrored itself on its parent church in Samoa and enjoyed the same autonomous characteristics. All the sermons and church activities are conducted in Samoan and according to the *fa'aSamoa*. Furthermore, all the *faiifeau* were graduates from either Malua Theological College in Samoa or Kanana Fou in American Samoa.

The establishment of the CCS in New Zealand is a testament of determination and symbol of their commitment to *fa'aSamoa* (Ioka 1998:141ff). For its members it centred on a desire to preserve indigenous forms of Christianity and to retain the traditions and language of their homeland. The CCS Churches in New Zealand, including the EFKS continued to the *fa'aSamoa* commitments such as the upkeep of their *faiifeau*, providing him a home and catering to all of his and his family's needs, this includes the *fa'alavelave* of their *faiifeau*. Moreover, all the CCS in New Zealand continues the work of its parent Church in Samoa. All members of the CCS contribute to the continued work of its Malua Theological College in Samoa, through the monthly *lafoga*.

For the Samoan migrants who are Roman Catholics generally integrated with non Samoan Catholics. Although there is no Samoan Roman Catholic "Church" there is a "Samoan Catholic community." The Samoan Catholic community normally congregate at St Pauls Cathedral at Barbados Street, where they are able to conduct their affairs according to the *fa'aSamoa*.

Many Samoan migrants that belonged to other denominations such as the Methodists (LT), the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), the Assembly of God (AOG), and The Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) at first were encouraged

to integrate into each of their non-Samoan congregations respectively. However, today each of these Christian denominations have established their own Samoan congregation and “church,” which is also led by its own Samoan minister/pastor.

## **2. The Role of the Church.**

The major role of the Church is the social, cultural and welfare of its Samoan congregation. In the New Zealand setting, the Samoan churches became not only places of worship but also a “syncretism institution.” The church acted as a “transition” station of sorts aimed at helping new arrivals adjust to the “New Zealand way of life” (Pitt & Macpherson 1974:52-53). Like the Auckland churches, the Christchurch churches were instrumental in helping new arrivals in adjusting to the “Kiwi” life. It provided assistance in secular matters such as housing, welfare and employment. As a result of this many of the ministers acted as translators and as “go betweens” with many of the social and welfare assistance early Samoan migrants needed. Ministers were called upon to provide practical assistance when newly Samoan arrivals needed to fill out forms for health, employment or judicial assistance or at any time when they had to deal with government agencies (Pitt & Macpherson 1974: 52ff; Hamilton 1974:41).

Today, the Church is not called upon to assist newly Samoan migrants with this form of assistance because many of the newly arrivals can rely on members of their own *aiga* to provide this practical assistance. However, the institution of the Samoan Church still take an active role on issues that affect their

members and the Samoan community at large. In this context the Samoan community in Christchurch, regardless of church affiliation is still viewed and operates as an *aiga potopoto* (extended family). For instance, the rise of teenage hooliganism within the Christchurch Square (town) prompted concerned parents into action requesting that “older males” patrol the Square on Friday and Saturday nights to ensure the safety of their children. The decision to patrol the Square was to not only protect their young Samoan children but also to make sure that “Samoan” kids were not branded “troublemakers.”

During the last forty years the role and the significance of the Church have not diminished but it has expanded. Furthermore, as the Samoan community in Christchurch matures, the role of the Church (es) and the needs of its congregations have become more complex and diverse. To address these issues present and future issues that may affect the Samoan community, a “fraternity” made up of ministers was set up. This fraternity consist of ministers and pastors from each of the Samoan churches in Christchurch; with one exception the President of the Samoan Catholic community is also invited as the representative of the Roman Catholic community. Regardless of different denominations the unified objective is to find a solution in a “consensus” fashion for the betterment of the Samoan community and maintain a united front. As the Fraternity’s President, Rev. Lapanā Faletolu states,

*The fraternity is designed to meet and address the issues that [affects] our people...and congregation. Our community is so big with different problems...the only way to solve them is to come together...if [we] come together to assist our people, a solution can be found ...*

*the Christian way...and in fa'aSamoa way.*

The role of the church, according to Rev. Faletolu is becoming more complex due to the needs of the “congregation” and the Samoan “community” as a whole, are more diverse and demanding. Many of the “traditional”<sup>8</sup> churches are facing challenges from within. One of these challenges is the declining number of younger Samoan members and the older members of the congregation dying. According, to Rev. Faletolu who insists that the Church must maintain a “balance” between the older Samoan born Samoans, who many are the “foundation” of the church and the younger Samoan born and New Zealand born Samoans, who is and the Church’s future (p/c 10/9/2001).

The institution of Church has always been a safe haven for Samoans to gather for social and secular activity. The Church provides a facility for learning, and youth activities, and other educational activities to flourish. Utilising traditional forms of mobilising funds and with the support and implementation of government funds, the Samoan churches have been instrumental in the setting up of “language nests” and early childhood learning. The main objective of these early childhood learning facilities and “language nests” was to maintain the Samoan language and the *fa'aSamoa*

For the Samoan migrant churches, employing the *fa'aSamoa* not only permitted the *fa'aSamoa* to continue but it also provided a distinctive identity – that is distinctly Samoan (Hendriske 1995:2-3). Many of the respondents in this

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<sup>8</sup> In the New Zealand environment and in the context of this thesis the PIPC is refer to as “traditional”

study identified with this and the reiterated that being Christians and Samoan is inseparable. For instance,

*Fa'aSamoa is very important in our church...the sermons are in Samoan...our church is similar to the churches in Samoa ...culture is very strong... our church promotes the youth to participate in much of the cultural events...ava ceremony... also in the choir...*

(“Sofia” [LT] SBS Group B)

*Of course I'm proud to be Samoan...and as a member of the EFKS its not like the other churches...as everything is done to fa'aSamoa.*

(“Mary” [EFKS] NZB Group B)

In some responses, this distinctive “Samoan” identity evolved into what some claim to be ultimately the “Samoan” church. For instance,

*All Samoans should go to EFKS, it's the only real fa'aSamoa church.*

(“Flo” [EFKS] NZB Group B)

*I personally I don't understand some of the Samoans that go to Mormon or SDA because on the one hand, they are proud to be Samoans and do the fa'alavelave of their aiga...but when there is a funeral, they are not allowed to do fa'aSamoa things like ie toga, lafoga and that.*

(“Nee” [LT] NZB Group A)

An important factor to emerge in this study was how attendance to church, though not compulsory dictated some of the respondents, their “sense” of belonging. Some NZB participant in both Group A and Group B stated that their decision not to attend church made many feeling alienated from the wider Samoan community. For these respondents their reference to other members of the Samoan community

as “them” which in reality consists of the Samoan community that attend church. For many of these NZB participants the absence of spiritual guidance and the “tapestry of culture” were too much of a contradiction.

Ironically, it is these same respondents who are now rethinking their decision to not attend church. The importance of “sense” of belonging and exposure to the *fa’aSamoa* for their children is becoming more important. Many of these NZB respondents stated that their children attend church and Sunday school with their grandparents. The following excerpt highlights how many are changing their attitude, for instance,

*I think when I was younger I was very critical of fa’aSamoa especially the church...and the financial demands and what seemed to me hypocritical it made me very anti fa’aSamoa and anti church ... now I’m older and very secure in who I am...I have changed my perspective and appreciate my experience in the church...and want the same for my children...it is important to me that they know who I am...where their grandparents are from...and their culture*  
 (“Lisa” [EFKS] NZB Group B).

The clash between “culture” and Christian theology is one of the major and oldest concerns in religion. This is no different among the Samoan community today. This is highlighted in the “life-cycle” events that involve the practices of the *fa’aSamoa* and the role of the Samoan churches, especially within “non-traditional” churches. As illustrated here,

*The hardest thing is when a member of our church dies...the family here and in Samoa want to just take over...they bring ie toga and want to do the funeral in fa’aSamoa...they don’t respect the wishes of the[our] family or the*

*beliefs of our church.*

(“Bob” [SDA] SBS Group A)

*We were brought up in the Mormon church...most of our cousins went to [...]...my parents converted to Mormonism about 15 years ago...they still participate in fa'alavelave of their aiga...on the day of my father's funeral we felt that we should have had a say in the running of dad's funeral...but his [Dad] family and my mother's family were concerned with doing fa'aSamoa and that our wishes were not important...or worst, fia palagi.*

(“Trisha” [Mormon] NZB Group B)

All the SDA and Mormon respondents in this study expressed similar “disrespectful” attitude of the wider Samoan community, especially in the decisions to the *fa'aSamoa* norms. To take this further, another perspective is needed so one is able to understand the importance of such “life-cycle” events, for instance,

*In fa'aSamoa there are two important days... the day you die and the day you marry ... the joining of two families...but also where “your” family is one...I understand [SDA] way is not to do fa'aSamoa...but the aiga must do it...its very important...if you are Samoan...when they say no fa'aSamoa they mean no ie toga... The funeral does not really belong to them [spouse or kids] it belongs to the family [the deceased]...it is the aiga's last duty.*

(“Lance” [EFKS] SBS Group A)

Excluding the SDA and Mormon participants in this study, the majority of the respondents stated that the stance of Samoan SDA and Mormon churches on this issue seemed hypocritical. Their argument centred on that being a Samoan SDA Church and a Samoan Mormon church were established to distinguish themselves

from other SDA and Mormon churches and to promote the *fa'aSamoa*, with the presence and traditional role of the *matai* in the congregation. However, in the cultural sphere their participation in the *fa'aSamoa* it is either prohibited or limited.

The Church provided a safe environment where Samoan immigrants were able to continue their cultural traditions (Pitt & Macpherson 1974:55; Hamilton 1974:41-45). As a result, the church became to replace the Samoan “village.” It provided an area for social status, political and economic competition to flourish, for the early migrants this meant recreating the traditional hierarchical social structure within the church.

Traditionally the traditional pattern of authority in the church has the *faiifeau* at the “head” and the *tiakono* (deacons), who are normally the *matai* as the executives. This is recreated in the majority of the traditional Samoan Churches in Christchurch; in regards to the Samoan Catholic community all their affairs are conducted in accordance to the *fa'aSamoa*.

This traditional pattern of authority is slowly beginning to be challenged from within, in particular, by recent Samoan arrivals. For many of the recent Samoan immigrants the church provides another avenue for social mobility within the Samoan community, yet this is hindered by the “conservatism” of the Samoan “establishment.” As some of the SBS participants express concerns and the dilemma of trying to get “established” while trying to deal with the “establishment,” as these two respondents highlight,

*Since I have been here...the old people here  
are still living in the 'old' Samoa...they are*

*so old fashion...they think Samoa has not changed...to hold a tofi [office] it is mainly the matai...but it should be if you are good enough..*

(“Eti ” [EFKS] SBS Group B)

*No, you don't have to be a matai to be a tiakono... that is trouble to much fia big ...that's why my husband and I go to [...] instead of [...]...over there too many 'gangs' ...we left with other members to start our own...we are still saving to bring a minister over...but we are more happy now...we all have a part in the decisions and that's the real fa'aSamoa*

(“Nina” [EFKS] SBS Group B)

It is evident that that the “conservatism” of the “establishment” ensures the perseverance of the *fa'aSamoa* but it also ensures that the pattern of authority will not change.

The rigid social hierarchy within the church and the inequality some members feel towards the traditional pattern of authority have been highlighted in the trend of “break away” churches within the traditional churches, especially in the EFKS. The “original” EFKS now located at Woolston have suffered a “break away” which is now EFKS St. Albans, who in turn also endured another “break away” – the EFKS Addington. For an untitled person positions such as deacons or elders are incentives to gain status and credibility within the church. However, titled deacons/elders will always have priority over untitled deacons. For many Samoans, their church life will be subjected to the non-egalitarian ethics of Samoan secular society, which will take precedence over the spiritual equality of the church (Palenapa 1993:66).

### 3. Challenges to the *fa'aSamoa* in the Church.

Taule'ale'ausumai (2001:181) argues that some of the New Zealand born Pacific young people is breaking away from the mainline churches that their parents have traditionally supported for newer, more individualistic faith communities. These new Christian movements offer a free, independent style of worship that purports cultural protocol,

*The widespread basic belief within New Religious Groups that every individual shall try to be a shining example through the way he or she lives,...there is no attempt at looking for long term solutions or tackling issues of injustice or looking at the roots of problems from a perspective of social awareness.  
(Ernst 1994:273)*

The majority of the NZB participants in both Group A and B state that the cultural factor and the sense of belonging to the wider Samoan community is a definite “pull” factor, many find solace and “spiritual guidance” elsewhere. For some of the younger SBS and NZB Samoan participants in Group B the “spiritual” guidance was found in other avenues such as Christian Fellowship Groups (CFG), but this did not in any way deter their allegiance to their “traditional” churches. Instead, for many of the NZB participants, CFG allowed the participants to “have a relationship with God” and enable them to “express” and worship more openly than their traditional churches permit. For example,

*I don't feel that being a member of the Christian Fellowship is different in regards to me being part of the [...] church...they are not separate issues and being a Sunday school teacher, member of the congregation, choir member does*

*not conflict with my role as Christian member  
in the Fellowship.*

(“Rose” [PIPC] NZB Group B)

*I still attend church services and then go to Fellowship  
rallies later on...I enjoy the singing and the enjoyment  
of praising the Lord with other Christians, Samoans  
and non-Samoans...I find its more for modern life...  
address issues that are happening today.*

(“Sione” [EFKS] SBS Group B)

Many of the SBS and NZB Samoan participants in Group B claimed that their participation in CFG is more to do with a “style” of worship, rather than distancing themselves with their traditional churches. The singing and “fellowship” of what CFG offers is a major “pull” factor. Although the majority of advocates CFG are largely among the NZB participants in this study their decision to partake in CFG, is generally accepted by the larger Samoan community. However, this does not seem to be the case for the SBS participants.

The existence of religious sects is no stranger to Samoans; they were in operation before John Williams arrived in the Samoan Islands (Gilson 1970:72-3,77). The existence of various religious sects has always functioned alongside with the institution of the Church. Some SBS and NZB participants in both Group A and Group B acknowledge and admit to their involvement with several religious sects.

For these participants, it is not a “choice” but simply a normal part of their Christian lives. The SBS participants, who partake in “sect” activity still belong and attend traditional Samoan churches and state that their involvement in a “sect” does not conflict with their membership in traditional churches. For instance,

*We go to PIPC and [...]...its not a big difference and many of the church [congregation] know ...we [other (...) members]meet two nights a week for Bible study and prayers... then on Saturdays with “others” [...] groups] to worship together.*

(“Sei” [PIPC] SBS Group A)

For the NZB participants who are involved in “sect” activity are adamant that their involvement is through their *aiga*. The negative connotation of “sects” is of great concern for these NZB participants, as one respondent remarks,

*[...] is not a sect...it is a group of people worshipping and praying to our Lord...I get really frustrated and angry with that label “sect” ...we are no different from AOG’s or many of the Christian fellowships out there... but we get label.*

(“Ruth” [PIPC] NZB Group B)

For the majority of the “sect” participants in this study state that the negative comments from the wider Samoan community are unfair. Although the existence of “sects” maybe frowned upon by the wider Samoan community, the real difference is “who” partakes in “sect” activity. That is, are the persons from traditional churches? Are they Samoan born or New Zealand born? The latter receive more tolerance from the wider Samoan community, whereas the “blame” is directed towards the parents and the *aiga*.

The literature available on Samoan churches in New Zealand identify one of the biggest challenges for traditional churches is the large number of New Zealand born Samoans leaving “mainline” churches due to the impact of *fa’aSamoa* on the institution of Christian churches in New Zealand (Palenapa

1993; Hendriske 1995; Tiatia 1998; Taule'ale'ausumai 2001). As mentioned earlier the number of “break away” congregations has had a significant impact on the Christchurch Samoan community. On one hand, the promotion of *fa'aSamoa* within Samoan churches have made the Church instrumental as the centre for community, and “cultural,” and secular activities. While on the other hand, the Church's hierarchical structures have witnessed the emergence of the “break away” churches. Moreover, the financial strain placed on members of Samoan congregations can be another source of tension within the *aiga* or when certain *matai* wanting to climb the social ladder; and also when a *faiifeau* is viewed as not considering or addressing his congregation first above his own aspirations.

This tension exists namely among and within the Samoan born Samoans. As the majority of the SBS participants in both Group A and Group B state that the widening gap between the “establishment” and the up-in-coming generation is where the clash of ideals emerge. The “establishment” consists namely of the older and influential members of the congregation, who the majority are early migrants and have played major roles in the “establishing” days of the Church. The “usurpers” are the recent migrants that are looked upon as the ones to take over. This group is viewed by many of the “establishment” as more “modern” in their approach and are criticised for either being *fia poto* (too smart) or *valea* (stupid – in this context it is referred to someone who does not know the *fa'aSamoa*).

Taule'ale'ausumai (2001:190-191) argues that one of the major threats facing the Pacific churches in New Zealand today is the ordination of women.

While there is definitely a change in the role of women within the home, and in the workforce, the traditional role of women in the Church is also being challenged slowly. The number of Samoan women entering the ministry is slowly increasing in the PIPC and Methodist churches, but this is not the case within the EFKS churches (Taule'ale'ausumai 2001:190). There are no ordained women among the Samoan churches in Christchurch.

Palenapa (1993:79) argues that the “place of birth” of a respondent plays a major part in determining how one views the role of the sexes and the role they have in the Church. This also seems to be the case in this study, the SBS participants in both Group A and Group B stated that there needs to be room for more equality and upward mobility for women in the Samoan Churches in New Zealand. It should be based on merit but this would only occur with the backing of the “establishment.” Men are the decision makers and leaders both in the secular sphere (*matai*, deacons/elders) and in the religious sphere (*faiifeau*). Women are regarded more as the advisors and supporters to men but their primary responsibility lies in the care of their children. Nearly all the NZB participants in both Group A and B were very “modern” in their attitude and believed that the role of the sexes within the church needed to be more flexible and equal. For example,

*If a person is committed to doing the work of the church...that's what is important...whether it is a male or a female is irrelevant.*

(“Api” [PIPC] NZB Group B)

*Women have always had a bit of a raw deal...in the church its probably the one area that it is hard for change...you're dealing not only with old*

*attitudes but also traditional and cultural barriers that is designed to ensure everyone has their own place in home, aiga and in the church.*

(“Maria” [RC] NZB Group A)

Although there are women elders, they usually fall into one of these categories: single, widowed, or married to a non-Samoan, or are “ordained” through their husband. This is because through a woman’s marital status, she and her husband are one, but her “voice” is through her husband. There are occasions when a husband and wife are both elders but this usually happens when the wife is already an elder prior to her marriage or it maybe achieved from a different church. This is starting to be challenged by some of the SBS women participants in both Group A and Group B, as this respondent exclaims,

*I have been a member of the PIPC for nearly thirty years...I am a member of the Women’s group, aufaipese (choir), a communicate member, because my husband is a elder, anything I want to say about the church is only done through him...it’s the same for all us married women...if your husband is alive and a tiakono then you are not allowed...they are our leo [voice]...but most of us do all the work...but my daughter who is not married is allowed to become an elder...its an old rule but not a fair one and must be changed.*

(“Tasi” [PIPC] SBS Group A)

Although a woman now holds a prominent position at St Pauls PIPC, the overall the representation of women in prominent positions in all Samoan Churches is still limited. All the female participants in this study acknowledge that if change is to occur it will slow but it will need the support at the top level first.

### c) **Role of the *faiifeau* (ministers/pastors)**

*The faiifeau...is a creation of the Samoans to meet the needs of the Gospel in fa'aSamoa. He has become a chief in order to have access to all people in society, although in essence he still is a servant of God...what ever titles culture has bestowed upon the faiifeau, they are intended to remind him that he is a servant of both God and man.*

(Setu cited in Anae 1998:94)

The objective here is to highlight how the significance and function of the *faiifeau* impacts on the *fa'aSamoa* within its Christchurch setting.

#### **1. Defining & Re-defining the role of the *faiifeau***

In Samoa, the *faiifeau* maintains a pivotal role in the religious and social climate of the church and within a village. The *faiifeau* is treated as the *Sui ole Atua* (God's representative). The *faiifeau* is referred to as the *feagaiga* that symbolises his special position within Samoan society but also marks the "va" between Samoan society and himself. The term *feagaiga* expresses,

*The idealised principles by which order exists in Samoan society at all levels of organisation. It contrasts sacred, moral ideological principles with utilitarian functional or "profane" human actions, in a social contract by which the former imposes order and dignity upon the latter.*

(Schoeffel 1979:287)

As the *feagaiga*, the *faiifeau* symbolises the mutual understanding between the *faiifeau* and the village; and the *faiifeau* and the *au lotu* (congregation). To be a *faiifeau*, the candidate needed to be a man of the cloth and knowledgeable in the *fa'aSamoa* (SSL Heath Nov 29 1838 cited in Ta'aese 1992:178). The latter became an integral part of in the successful appointment of the *faiifeau* from the standpoint of the village council. This is important because the appointment of a *faiifeau* is based on the approval of the village council but also the members of the congregation. The congregation provided the new *faiifeau* with a house, furniture, food, as well as any financial expenses of the minister and his family, including any *fa'alavelave* of the *faiifeau*, including his *aiga* that may occur.

One of the features among the Samoan migrant enclaves is the recreation of Samoan churches and the desire to re-establish the “*feagaiga*” in their new environment. These “traditional” obligations towards the *faiifeau* are still performed among the Samoan churches in the Christchurch today.

As mentioned earlier the Pacific churches became the “venue” for many new Pacific migrants to meet, socialise and conduct their cultural activities. As a result of this the role of the *faiifeau* expanded to meet the new needs of their congregation (Pitt & Macpherson (1974:58-60). The *faiifeau* became the spokesman and at times, a representative of not only members of his congregation but also well the Samoan community. To a certain degree, the *faiifeau* still performs these functions but this can be due to the special place the *faiifeau* holds within the Samoan community; as the *kudos* associated with being a “spokesman” or a “representative” for the Samoan people, as this investigation uncovers is

slowly beginning to be questioned and in some cases resented by some of the participants.

For many of the SBS participants in both Group A and Group B, the data uncovered two major findings: first, the importance of maintaining the *faiifeau* as the “head” of the Church but also in place in the Samoan community. The second finding centred on what the role of the *faiifeau* should be or should not be. The following excerpts highlight this,

*The faiifeau is the feagaiga and we (au lotu) must respect him...it is not our job to judge the faiifeau or tell him what we want...if the faiifeau is bad...that's up to God...but if we don't fa'aaloalo to the faiifeau ...that's our fault.*  
 (“David” [PIPC] SBS Group A)

*The faiifeau looks after the church...and everything else with the church...do the lauga (sermons) and help the ekalesia (congregation) ...but the running of and the decisions for the church should be left to the ekalesia not the faiifeau ...the money...election of the committee...that is the way it is done in Samoa and should be the same here.*  
 (“Sina” [EFKS] SBS Group A)

All the SBS and NZB participants in both Group A and Group B expressed concerns in further expanding the role of the *faiifeau*. Due to the sensitive nature of this subject much of the part of the discussion was conducted in the third person, or “generally.” For many of these older respondents their answers were submitted with care, in particular, when discussion about the “role” of the *faiifeau* as many allude to or spoke of an incident involving the resignation of a *faiifeau* from his position. Many spoke of the incident as a *mataga* (shameful) event,

which came about when a congregation became unhappy with their *faiifeau* and tried to dictate and pressure the *faiifeau* to conduct himself and his sermons to how some believed a *faiifeau* should be.

For the NZB participants in both Group A and Group B, two major factors dictated their responses in determining what the *faiifeau* role should be. The first factor is age. The majority of the NZB respondents in Group A stated that the *faiifeau* is the “servant of God” and acknowledged his special place in Samoan society, but also the *faiifeau* is “just an ordinary person” and that the congregation’s persistence to “elevate” the status of the *faiifeau* is part of the problem within the Church. Unlike the older NZB respondents, the majority of the NZB participants in Group B did not view the *faiifeau* as “just an ordinary person” but instead stated and viewed the *faiifeau* as the “leader”, “head”, and “father” of the Church.

The second factor to emerge among the NZB respondents focused on the perception of the *faiifeau* as a “servant of God” and the concept of “Samoan *faiifeau*,” as the *sui o le Atua – God’s representative*. The majority of NZB participants in Group B stated that there is a difference in the perception of a “minister” and “priest” in the European context, to that of the Samoan *faiifeau*. For all the NZB participants in Group B the most important factor is the cultural element. That is, the “way of doing things” which included “the way to approach” a *faiifeau*. The *faiifeau* is synonymous with the *fa’aSamoa*. As this respondents illustrates,

*The faiifeau [in our church] is really cool...sure there are people who always have some negativity...*

*but that's just the way it is...I believe a faifeau should be held accountable...if there are real concerns...but the faifeau and all he encompasses is very much fa'aSamoa.*

(“Gus” [LT] NZB Group B)

## **2. Innovations: perception & function of the *faifeau***

Today, the role and the responsibilities of the *faifeau* have not only increased but have become more diversified as the Samoan community in Christchurch continues to grow. The duties of the *faifeau* such as visiting the sick, attending to the educational activities – preschools, language nests, attending to community activities, a *fono* or called upon to open special events; as well as family celebrations such as weddings, and birthdays are just some of the duties which a *faifeau* is called upon by his congregation and community.

In an effort to meet the needs of the Samoan community and to provide support among the number of Samoan *faifeau* in Christchurch, a “ministers’ fraternity” was established. The fraternity’s objective is to guide the spiritual welfare of their “*fanau*” (children/congregation) and the provide support among the Samoan *faifeau*. The approach is designed to share the responsibilities that the *faifeau* have not only to their individual congregations but also to deal with the problems that affect the Samoan community; moreover, the united front provides a cohesive “unity” amidst the Samoan community as a whole. As it is illustrated below,

*because our fraternity is made up from different*

*denominations our aim is not to divide our 'goals' but to unite them...there are times when much of our decisions are according to fa'aSamoa... for many it is the only way they will understand*  
(Rev.T Vili [EFKS] p/c 10/2/2002)

*The fraternity is also a support system for the members, sometimes there may be a fa'alavelave in one church so its our duty as Christians and Samoans to help...that way the load is shared... we, as members and especially in Christchurch are lucky...as we are small enough to have an affiliation with the other churches.*  
(Rev. L Faletolu [PIPC])

I was fortunate to “observe” the fraternity in action at one of their monthly *fono*. My first observation was the absence of representatives or lay preachers that administer to any of the EFKS “break away” churches. The fraternity is loosely modelled on the *Fono tele* in Samoa. Each of the assemble ministers are representatives of their congregations, they come together to deliberate on issues that may affect the Samoan community, as a whole. The outcome of any decisions by the fraternity is reach by consensus.

One of the consistent themes echoed in this analysis of the significance and role of the *faiifeau*, is that all the respondents who attended Church regularly stated that the *faiifeau* were aware of and implemented strategies to address issues that affected all age groups within the church. In this context, the *faiifeau* is still facilitating “transition” between the “establishment” and “usurpers,” and between the older “traditional” Samoans and younger Samoan born and New Zealand born Samoans. For instance, a more modern approach to Sunday school, Youth Groups which are conducted namely in English and Samoan or presented by “leaders”

who fluent in both English and Samoan. The *faiifeau* is able to initiate this as “head” of the church, and as the *feagaiga*, and as a special “*matai*” and representative of the Samoan community.

## **Conclusion**

In Christchurch the institution of the Church, in particular the Samoan churches, remain a fundamental part of the Samoan community. The Church is a major catalyst in the evolution of the *fa’aSamoa*. From the outset, the Church has provided a safe haven for the early Samoan migrants to gather and conduct their cultural traditions outside the home, as well as a place to worship under the banner of Christianity. With great pride all the Samoan migrant churches in Christchurch are adamant about preserving the distinctive Samoan identity and *fa’aSamoa* elements of its ministry.

However, the Church does face challenge from within but also from external forces, which can be attributed to the Christchurch environment. Issues such as the declining number of older New Zealand born Samoans in regular attendance, older Samoan migrants – the “establishment” dying out, and the growing concern of the role of women within the Church, and the tension between the between the “establishment” and the “usurpers.” In Christchurch attempts to address these concerns not only within the Church but also the wider Samoan community have initiated strategies such as the Ministers’ Fraternity to be established.

It has been suggested that the church is a metaphor for the Samoan village, if this is to be so, then the Samoan Church will always be “home” for all the Samoan born Samoan migrants, now and in the future; however, for many of the New Zealand born Samoans the Samoan Church is a place of worship and a meeting of other New Zealand born Samoans, and where the *fa'aSamoa* is observed outside the home.

## Chapter 5: CONCLUSION

The concept *fa'aSamoa* continues to evolve within the Samoan migrant enclaves. Due to *fa'aSamoa* ability to 'shift its meaning' depending on context consensually, *fa'aSamoa* is able to flourish in its 'variant' form, yet maintain its principles, customs and traditions. This is the case amidst the Samoan Christchurch Samoan community.

One of the main reasons for this is the commitment and determination of the early Samoan migrants to maintain *fa'aSamoa*. Adherence to *fa'aSamoa* meant that not only was one proud to be 'Samoan' but also they were determined to stay as one. For many of these early migrants, *fa'aSamoa* served as a unifying factor in their new environment as well as a testament of their *tautua* (service) to their *aiga* and to Samoa. The early Samoan migrants played an active role in the 'chain migration' process, but also sent back to their *aiga* in Samoa large amount of capital and material goods. Furthermore, the formation of Samoan churches enabled many of the Samoan community to socialise and congregate outside the home and work place.

The Church provided a safe environment for all Samoans to meet and conduct their affairs according to *fa'aSamoa*. The church also became the place where important 'life-cycle' events such as weddings and funerals were conducted and where the *matai* took their place as the 'traditional' leaders and representatives for the Samoan community.

Fifty years on the Samoan community in Christchurch has not only increased but also the make up of the community has changed. The Samoan community is made up of the early migrants of predominantly the 1960s, more recent immigrants under the quota system or the family reunification policy, and also now first, second and third generation. Our hue is becoming less easy to identify. There are also a number of simmering tensions – generation gaps, intra cultural difference, and significant identity issues, which highlight the need for new strategies to be implemented to cope with the increasing and diverse Samoan population.

Simmering tensions exacerbated by a clash of western ideals and practices such as individualism with the principles of *fa'aSamoa*. This is evident in the role of Samoan women in the home, as *matai*, and in the church. Samoan women, young and old, Samoan born and New Zealand born are determined to challenge the “traditional” attitudes that stagnate their own destinies. However, the serious challenges to the “norm” seem to come from the recent arrivals and the Samoan born/New Zealand raised groups and is directed towards the “establishment.”

Yet, a commitment to the *fa'aSamoa* still remains strong among the Samoan Christchurch community. It is a commitment and an acknowledgement to the *fa'aSamoa* that is manifested in various ways depending on each group. For the “establishment” the *fa'aSamoa* became the link to Samoa, for the recent arrivals the *fa'aSamoa* is a “way of life.” For the majority of first generation New Zealand born the *fa'aSamoa* represented a “culture” that encompasses everything

but is only appreciated and understood, as one gets older. For younger New Zealand born Samoans the *fa'aSamoa* is synonymous with “identity.”

The diversity of the Samoan community serves to illustrate the evolution of the *fa'aSamoa*. From its “classical” model to the “various” definitions that exists, there is one dominant theme the concept of the *fa'aSamoa* is distinctly Samoan.

To conclude, I present the reader with yet another definition, my own. The concept of the *fa'aSamoa* is a “**concept of traditions.**” A tradition locked in **history**, which reminds all Samoans of their “roots.” A tradition locked in a **quest**, which reminds one of the foundation built in this new homeland, by the early Samoan migrants and the sacrifices they endured . A tradition locked in **culture**, which is alive in the Samoan language, the Christian churches and in our participation of the *fa'alavelave* of our *aiga*.

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## Interviewees

### Group A: (35+)

Rev. Lapana Faletolu – St Pauls Trinity Pacific Island Presbyterian Church

Rev. Tumama Vili – Ekalesia Fa’apopotoga Kersiano Samoa – Woolston

“Maria” – NZB	“Viva” – SBS	“Pepe” – SBS
“Lyd” – NZB	“Tony” – SBS*	“Tufi” – SBS
“Fia” – NZB	“George” – SBS*	“Dave” – SBS*
“Stevie” – NZB	“Lance” – SBS*	“Manu” – SBS*
“Miles” – NZB	“Sina” – SBS	“Niu” – SBS*
“Teri” – NZB	“Elizabeth” – SBS	“Bob” – SBS*
“Loma” – NZB	“Ata” – SBS	“Sei” – SBS
“Rosie” – NZB	“Olo” – SBS*	“Sakia” – SBS
“KC” – NZB*	“Seila” – SBS	“Peka” – SBS
“Mele” – NZB*	“Fale” – SBS	
“Nee” – NZB	“Isa” – SBS	

### Group B: (34-)

“Paul” – NZB	“Lisa” – NZB	“Tasi” – SBS
“Marie” – NZB	“Trisha” – NZB	“Paulo” – SBS
“Tai” – NZB	“Api” – NZB	“Lea” – SBS
“Gus” – NZB	“Mesa”	“Moana” – SBS
“Val” – NZB		“Jo” – SBS
“Rose” – NZB		“Sione” – SBS
“Traci” – NZB		“Nina” – SBS
“Ruth” – NZB		“Sofia” – SBS
“Gina” – NZB		“Viv” – SBS
“Lei” – NZB		“Lala” – SBS
“Edna” – NZB		“Eti” – SBS*
“Fred” – NZB		“Robert” – SBS*
“Mary” – NZB		

\*matai

5 October 2001

To The Human Ethics Committee,

I am writing in regard to the delicate nature of my research topic – “the Fa’a Samoa: an examination of how the fa’a Samoa is being reshaped in Aotearoa/New Zealand”. As this is a sensitive but important issue for many Samoans in New Zealand and abroad, I believe that one must adopt a more ‘cultural’ approach than an academically prescribed approach. I have enclosed a copy of the questions I will be asking during the interviews I propose to conduct.

Due to the sensitivity of the topic – the fa’a Samoa, I believe that by constructing a sociological profile of the participant is a vital factor of the interviewing process and crucial for this study, as many of the issues being addressed will cross into ‘cultural’ barriers. Furthermore, by constructing a sociological profile of the participants the chances of offending the participant (within the Samoan protocols) will not occur, especially when interviewing the older members of the Samoan community and ministers, and the Samoan ‘matai’ – chiefs.

I thank you for your time and will be happy to answer any enquires that you may have.

Yours faithfully,

Lona Siauane.

**LETTER OF CONSENT**

I ..... agree to be interviewed as part of the research project of Lona Siauane, examining the changing nature of the fa'a Samoa.

I also reserve the right to withdraw from the research project at any time, or withdraw any information I choose.

I understand that the text of my interview will be securely stored by the researcher and destroyed one year after the completion of this thesis.

Signed .....

Date .....

## INFORMATION SHEET for PARTICIPANTS.

At the outset, a study of the 'fa'a Samoa' may seem to some an easy task of simply translating the 'Samoan Way'. However, it has become increasingly evident that the fa'a Samoa of the new millennium is in stark contrast with that which our parents brought over from Samoa in the 1960s and 1970s. My initial interest in the fa'a Samoa stemmed from a description that stated that 'the fa'a Samoa permits change and adaptations, but it, still remains the same'. The question I believe is how does the fa'a Samoa, survive change and various adaptations. The quest for answers lies at the heart of this inquiry and it is a quest that I invite you to join in.

The goal is to determine and identify "What is the fa'a Samoa in New Zealand", and explore the significance and transition from simply 'a way of life' to a 'cultural identity' that unites all Samoans, here and abroad. To address this, one must explore and analyse the social dynamics of the fa'a Samoa that plays an integral part of our lives as Samoans living in New Zealand.

The topics under discussion are the *aiga*, *the matai* and *the church*. It is noted that the three topics are of a sensitive nature to all Samoans, and the utmost care will be taken to ensure confidentiality for all participants. Moreover, by examining these major institutions we are then able to gain a better understanding and appreciation of our past; as well as solutions for future dilemmas.

QUESTIONS : formal/structured interviews.

**Name of Participant:**

**Male/Female**

**Age group:**

**Place of Birth:**

**How long in New Zealand: (if Samoan born)**

1. Are both parents Samoan?
2. What part of New Zealand have you spent most of your life/or time in? If you were born and grew up outside Christchurch, please state.
3. Did the secondary school you attend have a large number of Samoans? If so, did you socialise with them?
4. Did you attend any tertiary institutions, and if so, did you join or participate in clubs, Associations that encouraged and promoted the fa'a Samoa?
5. Have you ever been to Samoa? If yes, describe your experience and your impression of life there?
6. What is your own interpretation of the fa'a Samoa?
7. To what extent is the 'fa'a Samoa' conducted at home?
8. To what extent does your knowledge of the fa'a Samoa and your participation, stem from your parents or from your own choice?
9. Do you see any advantages or disadvantages of the fa'a Samoa as it functions in New Zealand? Please state what aspects. Does the fa'a Samoa have a future in New Zealand, if so, what role should there be for it?
10. What are some of the changes, if any are needed within the fa'a Samoa? Would these proposed changes be crucial for its survival or crucial for the Samoans in New Zealand?

**(II)**

11. Do you currently attend Church? (If yes, please specify)
12. Is this the only Church that you have been part of? (If no, please list other churches)

13. Do you partake in any of the activities of the Church? (for example, Choir, Youth Group or Sunday School)?
14. To what extent is your family's commitment to the Church based upon the fa'a Samoa? (For example, alofa to the minister; the various offerings of groups – deacons, mothers)
15. How often is your family obliged to commit to 'fa'alavalavas'? (For instance, your father may be a matai or one could be following the instructions of the matai)
16. To what extent do these family commitments influence your family finances?
17. How much of your participation is done out of loyalty towards your parents?

**(III)**

18. Are you in current employment?
19. At your place of employment or/and within your socialising circles, do you actively engage the company of other Samoans? If so why? If not, why not?

