Governance in Samoa

Elise Huffer and Asofou So’o Editors
Governance in Samoa
Leulua'iali'i Seinafo Tau'ili'i Tupu'i Ioane, Tulafale at Lufilufi Village 'Upolu
Governance in Samoa

*pulega i Sāmoa*

Elise Huffer and Asofou So’o
Editors

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## Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCA</td>
<td>Controller and Chief Auditor</td>
</tr>
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<td>CCC</td>
<td>Congregational Christian Church (Protestant)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOH</td>
<td>Department of Health</td>
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<tr>
<td>GACC</td>
<td>Government Aid Coordinating Committee</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>gross domestic product</td>
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<td>GGA</td>
<td>good governance agenda</td>
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<td>HRPP</td>
<td>Human Rights Political Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>LTPS</td>
<td>Long Term Perspective Study (World Bank)</td>
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<tr>
<td>MWA</td>
<td>Ministry of Women’s Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCW</td>
<td>National Council of Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>non-government organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td>NUS</td>
<td>National University of Samoa</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLP</td>
<td>Samoa Labour Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNDP</td>
<td>Samoa National Development Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUNGO</td>
<td>Samoa Umbrella Group for NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAGST</td>
<td>value-added goods and services tax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAC</td>
<td>Women’s Advisory Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
</tr>
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<td>WSWA</td>
<td>Western Samoa Water Authority</td>
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</table>
Glossary of Samoan terms

afioga tatasi  council decree
aga'ifanua   customs or practises peculiar to particular villages and families
aganu'u     customs or practises common to all villages
ʻāiga        family
ʻāiga i le tai ‘family in the sea’; refers to the traditional district comprising the islands of Manono and Apolima and their extensions on the north western coast of ʻUpolu island
ʻāiga potopoto extended family
ʻaitu         ghost
aliʻi         chief
aliʻi faipule member of the advisory council during the German (1900–14) and New Zealand (1914–61) administrations; member of parliament
aliʻi matua   senior aliʻi
aliʻi ma faipule chiefs and orators
aliʻi paʻia    sacred chief
alofa         love
aʻoʻo fesoasoani lay preacher
asiasiga     visitation
ati ma le lau a traditional form of punishment which involves the wholesale uprooting of family and property from the village. Anything left standing is slashed and burnt. Associated with this form of banishment is the deletion from memory of any form of existence, past, present or future.
atunuʻu       nation
auluma        a village organisation comprising married and unmarried village girls
ʻaumaga       village organisation comprising untitled men
ʻautalavou    youths
ʻau uso        the Brethren
ekalesia      congregation
faʻaalalo     respect
faʻafetai lava thank you very much
faʻalavelave  cultural events that require traditional exchanges of goods, for example, funerals, matai title installation, building dedication and so forth
faʻaleleiga   reconciliation
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Translation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fā'alupega</td>
<td>honorific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fa'amagaloga</td>
<td>forgiveness, pardon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fa'amasei'au</td>
<td>public defloration of a bride</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fa'amasino Sāmoa</td>
<td>judge of the land and titles court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fa'amatai</td>
<td>matai system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fa'aSāmoa</td>
<td>Samoan way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fa'avae</td>
<td>constitution, foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fafine laiti</td>
<td>literally, young women but it refers to the wives of untitled men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fāia</td>
<td>connection; relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faifea'u</td>
<td>village pastor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fale</td>
<td>house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>falefā</td>
<td>house of four</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faleiva</td>
<td>house of nine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fale pālagi</td>
<td>European-style house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>falesā</td>
<td>literally sacred house; church structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faleSāmoa</td>
<td>Samoan house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faletua</td>
<td>wife of the ali'i; also used as a polite word to address wives in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>faletua ma tausi</td>
<td>wives of chiefs and orators respectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feagaiga</td>
<td>status given to a sister and through her, to all her descendants; also used to address a village pastor who has taken the traditional place of a sister in his relation to the village/parish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fia pālagi</td>
<td>wanting to be like a European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>filemū</td>
<td>peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fono</td>
<td>meeting, council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fonotele</td>
<td>annual general meeting of the Congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fono a matai</td>
<td>meeting of chiefs and orators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fono a faipule</td>
<td>meeting of members of parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>itumalo</td>
<td>district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>komiti tumamā</td>
<td>women's committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lago</td>
<td>flies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lauga</td>
<td>speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>le mafau</td>
<td>reckless, ill-mannered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malae</td>
<td>meeting place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malae o le filemū</td>
<td>the ground of peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mana</td>
<td>invincible divine power obtained from ancient gods through kinship connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>matai</td>
<td>titled person, chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malō</td>
<td>government, state</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>malosi</td>
<td>strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maota</td>
<td>residential site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mau</td>
<td>literally opinion, but also refers to Mau a Pule</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Governance in Samoa

Mau a Pule political pressure group of the six traditional districts of Savai’i island in 1908-09
mu le foaga death and destruction of all property
nu’u village, council of village matai
ofisa o le malo government offices
osi ‘aiga or mata ‘aiga keenness to uphold family relations
paepae stone foundation
pa’ia sacred
pitomu’u sub-village
poto educated
pule authority; the six political centres on Savai’i island, which are Sāfotulafai, Sāle’aula, Sāfotu, Asau, Vailoa and Sātupa’itea
pule’aga reign
pulega regime
pulenu’u village mayor
pulefa’ato’aga agricultural inspector
sā’oao leading females of families in the village sub-organisation of village married and unmarried women (aualuma)
solifa’avae violation of the covenant
su’a food presentation
suafa matai title
sui o le malo representative of government, village mayors are sometimes referred to as sui o le malo
tafa’ifa holder of four highest ranking titles in Samoa
ta’imua and faipule the bicameral system
tama-a-‘aiga holders of the titles Mālietoa, Tupua Tamasese, Tuimaleali’ifano and Matā’afa.
tamafafine female descendants
tamasā the son of the oldest sister at the highest level of a lineage branch
tama’ita’i ladies
tamaiti children
tamaloa man
tamatane male descendants	atala open
taulaga annual church collection
taulāitu spirit medium
taule’ale’a untitled man
taulele’a untitled men
tausi wife of an orator
tautai fisherman
tautua to serve; service
ti’akono deacon
ti’akono toea’ina senior deacon
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tr>
<td>tōfā</td>
<td>counsel</td>
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<tr>
<td>tuagane</td>
<td>brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tuāmaota</td>
<td>family land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tuiga</td>
<td>head-dress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tulafale</td>
<td>orator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tulafono</td>
<td>law; regulations; rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tūmua</td>
<td>the four political centres on ‘Upolu island: Leulumoega, Malie, Afega and Lufilufi, which are villages comprising mainly orators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tupu</td>
<td>king</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tupua‘iga</td>
<td>worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tupufia</td>
<td>holder of three of the four highest ranking titles, which are Tuiā‘ana, Tuiātua, Gatoa‘itele and Tamosoali’i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tusi fa‘alupega</td>
<td>book of honorifics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tusi taulāsea</td>
<td>book of traditional medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tutōʻatasi</td>
<td>independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>umu</td>
<td>earth oven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vaīvāi</td>
<td>losing side; weak</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Contributors

**Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop** is Head of Continuing Education at the University of the South Pacific, and is located at the Alafua Campus, Samoa. She has researched widely on Pacific issues, and worked for many years with women’s NGOs. Presently she is working on a campaign with the National Council of Women (NCW) to *Tetee Atu le sasa ma le upu malosi* (Hold back your hands and your harsh words). Peggy’s PhD thesis, completed at Macquarie University, looked at Women, Education and Development in Samoa. She is married and has five daughters.

**Elise Huffer** is Fellow and Coordinator of Pacific Studies at the Institute of Pacific Studies at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. Her current research interests are politics and governance in the Pacific with a focus on Vanuatu and Samoa. Prior to coming to Fiji, she was based in New Caledonia/Kanaky as a consultant in politics and socioeconomics.

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**Iati Iati** is a Graduate Degree Fellow with the East–West Centre in Hawai’i and is undertaking a PhD in Political Science at the University of Hawai’i at Manoa. Iati completed his MA in 1999 at the University of Canterbury.

**Cluny Macpherson** is Head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Auckland. His research interests are economic and social development in the Pacific.

**La’avasa Macpherson** is a part time research assistant in the Department of Sociology and a part time orchardist. The Macphersons have together published many articles on Samoa.

**Malama Meleisea** is Regional Advisor for Social and Human Sciences and Asia and the Pacific (RASHSAP) for UNESCO and is based at the Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok. He was Director of the Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of Auckland from 1993 to 1998 and Director of the Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of Canterbury from 1988 to 1993. Malama hails from the village of Poutasi.

**Alfred Schuster** is completing his MA in Political Studies from the University of Auckland. His thesis focuses on a theory of governance using Samoan political concepts and institutions as a framework in
contrast to the governance agenda promoted by international organisations. Although he currently resides in Auckland, Alfred is from Samata, Savai’i on his father’s side and from Salimu, Fagaloa on his mother’s side. Alfred is married to Merekeleni Sigabalavu and has two sons, Leulumatua and Moana.

Asofou So’o is the Head of History Department at the National University of Samoa. Asofou holds two *tulafale* titles: Lau from Lotofaga village (Asofou’s mother’s village—conferred in 1985) and Puai’aunofo from Savaia village (his father’s village—conferred in early 1998). Asofou previously taught at Avele College and Tokoroa High School. His research interests include history, politics and culture.

Donovan Storey teaches Development Studies in the School of Global Studies at Massey University, New Zealand and previously worked at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. His research interests include urban issues, particularly housing, poverty and governance, the politics of development, non-government and community organisations, development theory and small states. His regional interests lie in the Pacific Islands and South-East Asia.

Serge Tcherkézoff is Lecturer at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales and co-founder of the Centre de recherche et de documentation sur l’Océanie (established in 1995) and of the Maison Asie-Pacifique (established in 1999). He has been conducting research in Western Polynesia for over 15 years and has published many articles on Samoa. In 1997 he edited a book entitled *Le Pacifique-Sud aujourd’hui. Identités et transformations culturelles*, Editions du CNRS.

Morgan Tuimaleali‘ifano teaches Pacific Islands’ History with the Department of History and Politics at the University of the South Pacific in Laucala Bay. His research interests are customs and traditions in Western Polynesia and Pacific Islands diasporas.

Unasa Leulu Felise Va’a received the orator title of Leulu in 1976 and the *ali‘i* title of Unasa in 1993. He was educated at Marist Brothers’ School, Apia, St Thomas School, Lower Hutt, and St Patrick’s College, Upper Hutt, New Zealand. Unasa pursued his education at Canterbury University and Massey University, New Zealand and the Congregational Christian Church University of Samoa from which he graduated with a BA in Samoan Studies in 1983. He completed his PhD in Social Anthropology at the Australian National University in 1996. Unasa specialises in social linguistics and Samoan migration. He has been a lecturer in Samoan Studies at the state-owned National University of Samoa since 1987 and is currently Senior Lecturer in Samoan Studies and Dean of the Faculty of Arts.
Introduction

Elise Huffer and Asofou So’o

In his chapter on ‘The contingency of language’, Richard Rorty (1989) hypothesises that new vocabulary comes to replace past vocabulary, not because it reflects a supposed ‘truth’ but because it is a ‘better’ or more ‘efficient tool’ for current circumstances. New vocabulary enables us to think in new ways about past, present and possibly future situations. Is this the case with the term governance? Although the idea of ‘governance’ itself is by no means revolutionary or indicative of a major upheaval in society, it provides a different way of looking at politics and economics. It may be argued that it both describes and encourages the decentralisation of decision making by acknowledging the role of the private sector and ‘civil society’ alongside the public sector. We no longer expect government to be the sole director of public affairs. A recent global illustration of ‘governance at work’ rather than ‘government at work’ was the World Trade Organization meeting held in Seattle in November 1999 in which all three actors played an active part. It is clear that negotiations in the area of world trade depend on non-governmental organisations as well as on governments and private sector lobbies.

The term governance has been given many different definitions and meanings as indicated in this volume and in earlier publications. But because it is a term which was first ‘recoined’ by the World Bank and has since been promoted by other international institutions and large powers with a specific agenda, it has been treated with a healthy degree of suspicion by many academics, professionals and lay people. Various authors in this volume (Fairbairn-Dunlop, Goldsmith, Huffer and Schuster, Iati, Cluny and La’avasa Macpherson, and Storey) refer widely to the institutional and academic literature on governance and the
governance agenda within and beyond the Pacific. They also provide their own views of some of the agenda’s shortcomings, in particular its ‘moral posturing’, ‘trendiness’, disregard for local context, suggesting ‘pre-ordained’ solutions for complex problems, its potential for de-structuring delicately balanced social institutions and groupings, and encouraging questionable reform. Both Iati and Fairbairn-Dunlop demonstrate how, in the case of Samoa, the governance agenda may ironically lead to greater centralisation of government by de-emphasising the role of community-based groupings and replacing them with ‘artificial’ non-governmental organisations which are closely linked to government.

Governance, though, has its advantages, not only for its active promoters (World Bank, IMF, OECD, ADB and others) but also for the observers and actors of public life. To begin with it enables the latter to discuss sensitive issues without appearing to do so. Criticising governance is not equal to criticising government, since the latter is only one of the contemporary actors in the three-tiered equation (public sector, private sector and ‘civil society’) established by the current concept of governance. In the case of the Pacific, politics remains a delicate issue (even though it has led to numerous publications). Open discussion of politics within many island countries of the Pacific is hampered by a high degree of sensitivity linked to status, kinship and small communities, even at the ‘national’ level. Talking about ‘good governance’ therefore provides a way of talking about ‘good politics’ in an indirect way.

As stated by Huffer and Schuster, the governance debate could also provide a new opportunity to question values, ideologies, written or spoken rules and institutions. If governance is about the management of society by all those who make up society and the need to review how societies, and politicians, manage themselves, it provides an opportunity to look at old questions and issues under a new light. In some countries, the governance debate may be about lessening the role of the state to enhance local initiatives, while in others it may be about promoting greater civil liberties and political participation or about developing private initiative. The focus of this book is therefore to assess what governance is, and should be about, in Samoa.

**Governance and Samoans**

This volume originated when two of its contributors were conducting their research in Samoa. Various people they interviewed were interested
in the issue and offered to contribute to the governance debate from their own perspective. The editors thought that it was important that the book have a strong Samoan character because the onus of examining current governance issues should lie with the Samoan people themselves. We are not claiming the Samoan contributors represent the Samoan nation as a whole but we do believe they have an ‘insider’ understanding of the topics they discuss. For instance, Meleisea and Tuimalaleali’ifano describe their own experience of decision making in their villages. Fairbairn-Dunlop, who has been active both as a researcher and an adviser on women’s issues, has first-hand knowledge of the difficulties the new governance agenda is creating for the more ‘traditional’ women’s organisations in Samoa. Her critical review of current policies is the result of her active participation in that area. So’o, who teaches at the National University of Samoa (NUS), gives his own assessment of civil and political liberties on his country based on various cases which have been widely discussed in Samoa. His colleague at NUS, Va’a, examines the relationship between villages and central government, a key aspect of Samoan governance. As a resident of Samoa, he is acutely aware of the day-to-day tensions which occur between both these institutions.

The country

Samoa became the first independent island country of the Pacific in 1962. This is a legacy the Samoans are proud of just as they are of their own system of governance, the fa’amatasi (see Tcherkézoff in this volume for details on the fa’amatasi). Since independence, Samoa has been well regarded by its neighbours, development partners and the international community. A vivid illustration of this was the praise received by Tofilau Eti Alesana, Samoa’s longest standing Prime Minister when he resigned. New Zealand’s then Foreign Affairs minister, Don McKinnon, referred to Tofilau Eti as ‘one of the true giants of politics in the Pacific Islands,’ adding that ‘he was probably one of New Zealand’s greatest friends’ (NZPA 2 December 1998). Helen Clark, now New Zealand’s Prime Minister, had a motion moved while she was leader of the opposition, for her country’s parliament to ‘record its appreciation of the service over many years of the retiring Samoan prime minister’ (NZPA 2 December 1998). Tofilau Eti’s funeral was well attended by the leaders of the region.

Over the years Samoa has maintained a good development record in spite of experiencing some years of low growth as well a couple of
devastating cyclones such as Ofa in 1990 and Val in 1991, causing damage estimated at US$368 million (Ward and Ashcroft 1998). Although it remains on the United Nation's list of Least Developed Countries, Samoa has been able to provide adequately for its people. It has the highest adult literacy rate in the region (95.7 per cent) behind Tonga and Niue (99 per cent and 97 per cent respectively) even though education is not compulsory (UNDP 1999). A tradition of self-sufficiency through subsistence agriculture continues to provide for nutritional needs in spite of the taro blight which hit the country in the early 1990s. Village autonomy, along with customary land tenure, has enabled the Samoans to fulfill many of their cultural needs and obligations, as well as basic sanitary and health requirements (see Fairbairn-Dunlop this volume). Other factors ensuring the wellbeing of the population are the beautiful environment and easy access to the sea (most villages are coastal), to rivers and natural fresh water springs and a generally fertile soil (see Ward and Ashcroft 1998 for details of land features). In addition, many Samoans live abroad (approximately 200,000) providing their home country with substantial income from remittances (US$39.53 million in 1998) (Cuthberson 1999) and easing the pressure on the land.

In the mid-1990s the Samoan government embarked upon economic reform to enhance the private sector, improve efficiency in the public sector, modify the tax base (reduction of tariffs and duties as well income tax, introduction of value-added tax) and liberalise controls on the financial sector. These reforms have been well received by Samoa’s development partners and by economists (Va’ai 1999; Cuthberson 1999) who view them as signs of ‘good governance’. This is also how Samoa promotes them as illustrated by the Head of State, Malietoa Tanumafili II’s comments at independence celebrations in 1999.

It goes without saying that our partners in development would not have been so forthcoming and generous if they did not believe in the sound and solid system of good governance that we have here in Samoa. It is indeed a sign of their confidence and trust in our government’s ability to govern and implement practical policies and sound austerity measures that they continue to provide assistance...

(Tala Nei News 3 June 1999).

The government’s focus on economic and financial reform and its success in publicising it regionally, has in part enabled it to side-step delicate political issues which have been raised consistently by the opposition and media in past years.
Many issues such as allegations of corruption, unaudited public accounts, pressure and threats against the independent press and preventing debate in parliament have plagued the Samoan government since the mid-1990s. The latter’s dominance in parliament, however, has generally allowed it to ‘shrug’ these off and to rule without much consideration for opposing views. The reality of the continual governance problems in Samoa, however, struck on the night of 16 July 1999 when the Minister of Works, Electric Power Corporation and the Samoa Water Authority, Luagalau Levaula Kamu, was shot dead shortly after the opening of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Human Rights Protection Party (the party in power) function at which he was acting as co-MC (Tala Nei News 17 July 1999). The man who pulled the trigger is the son of Leafa Vitale who, at the time of the assassination, was Minister of Women’s Affairs and of Statistics. Leafa Vitale had been Minister of Public Works when Tofilau Eti Alesana was prime minister and had first been ‘demoted’ to the Ministry of Post Office and Telecommunications and then to Women’s Affairs (Tala Nei News 29 July 1999). He had been ‘demoted’ partly as a result of allegations against him published in the Controller and Chief Auditor’s 1994 report (see Macpherson and Macpherson in this volume for details on the report). Both Leafa Vitale and former Minister of Telecommunications, Toi Aukuso, have been convicted of murder and are serving life sentences.

Shortly after the assassination, the Samoan prime minister stated that the murder was the work of a ‘nut’. However, some days later, he said that the minister had been killed for ‘trying to be transparent and accountable’ and that he ‘apparently [had] angered some who might have been unsuccessful in getting what they want[ed]’ (Tala Nei News 29 July 1999). The prime minister, in his eulogy at Luagalau Levaula Kamu’s funeral also praised him for his ‘efforts to pursue good governance’ (Tala Nei News 29 July 1999).

Leafa Vitale and Toi Aukuso’s action seems to be the culmination of a pattern of threats and misconduct which weren’t checked or reprimanded under Tofilau Eti Alesana’s leadership. Other prominent people in Samoa had previously received death threats from these two ministers but had not been able to do anything about it. It seems that the ministers felt protected by their position and thought their actions above the law.

The first political assassination in Samoa since independence, is a clear warning that some have used their political power to advance their
own private or family interests while disregarding the country as a whole. Although this incident was not predictable, it is a symptom of a political malaise and indicates the need for a governance agenda which focuses less on ‘technocratic’ issues (see Macpherson and Macpherson, Storey, Huffer and Schuster this volume) and more on political matters.

The format of the book

The first chapter examines the concept of governance in the Pacific context in general. Goldsmith argues that it is a morally loaded term which is underscored by four assumptions: the ‘so-called doomsday scenario,’ the ‘weak state,’ the ‘ascendancy of neo-liberalism’ and increasing corruption in the region. Because governance is not a neutral term but rather a ‘code word,’ Goldsmith points out that it should be treated with suspicion. His ‘concern...is not so much in the applicability or otherwise of governance concepts to specific instances as with the dangers that surround the topic itself.’

The next five chapters examine various aspects of governance and the ‘good governance agenda’ (GGA) in Samoa. The Macphersons argue that the ‘technical solutions’ proposed by the GGA might not work in a cultural context whose values are often antithetic to those promoted by the GGA. They begin by stating that, however, because external assistance is to a certain extent predicated (and will become more so) on good governance behaviour by developing countries like Samoa, the latter will have to adopt certain reforms. But will these work in Samoa and how will society adapt to them or help them flourish?

In Chapter 3, Huffer and Schuster document Samoan views of governance, bad governance, good governance and answers to the following questions: ‘what are the causes of breakdown in governance and what are the remedies to breakdowns in governance?’ Based on the answers, they conclude that Samoa must be seen as ‘politically plural’ rather than as a politically homogenous society, in which the government should take the lead in encouraging informed and open political debate.

Iati, in Chapter 4, is concerned that the GGA will harm Samoan civil society construed as community and kin-based ‘natural’ groupings by promoting contractual, voluntary organisations which are foreign to Samoan culture.

Storey (Chapter 5) critically explores the governance agenda with respect to urban management and examines the obstacles to setting up a management framework in urban areas in Samoa. He is not convinced
the GGA as currently formulated will help solve the problems which are increasingly plaguing Apia.

Dunlop-Fairbain, in Chapter 6, regrets that the GGA is neglecting to acknowledge the contributions of the *komiti tumama* (Women’s Health Committees) to health in Samoa. She argues that the health partnership between the state and the village-based *komiti tumama* is being cast aside in favour of government’s new relationship with urban-based non-governmental organisations with no links to the grass roots. According to Dunlop-Fairbairn this might ultimately negatively affect health in Samoa.

Chapters 7 through 11 do not develop theoretical aspects of governance or of the GGA, but rather focus on various aspects of governance or politics in Samoa. Tcherkezoff (Chapter 7) provides a historical perspective on the evolution of the concept of *matai* which is so central to governance in Samoa. He demonstrates that far from being a constant long-term feature of Samoan society, the *matai* is a recent institution which is indicative of a movement towards democratisation of the Samoan polity. This is important to understanding the ‘tradition versus democracy’ debate which questions the legitimacy of the *fa’amatai* in contemporary politics.

In Chapter 8, So’o gauges the scope of civil and political liberty by examining: what the constitution says and, how freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom to form and join organisations have fared in recent years. So’o looks at various court cases to illustrate how the latter have been acted upon or curtailed. He concludes that, generally, they have been respected by the state within the guidelines set forth by the constitution, but that they are nonetheless jeopardised by the practices of some village governments and of certain candidates at election time.

Va’a (Chapter 9) demonstrates that Samoa continues to experience tensions between village and national government. He argues that this problem was not solved during colonial times, was passed on at independence and is still not resolved almost 40 years later. This, he argues, poses problems in the area of human rights as demonstrated by some infamous incidents at Salamumu and Samalaeulu villages, in which religious disputes led to the banning and public humiliation of villagers, and by the tragic murder in Lona village. Va’a concludes that more research needs to be undertaken in the area of state/village relations for a suitable arrangement to be devised.

In Chapter 10, Tuimaleali’ifano provides a detailed case study of the manipulation of custom by those in power. He relates an incident
involving a pastor, his family, village leaders and church funds in Falelatai to demonstrate how aga'ifanua (custom or practices peculiar to certain villages) is ‘re-invented’ to cover up malversations. He concludes that village governance favours those with high traditional status and prevents dissent and real debate of important issues. Finally he argues for changes in village governance: ‘Unless a modern form of local village government evolves with a bureaucracy regulating financial transactions and monitoring the accountability of decisions pronounced as custom, long-term development goals will be frustrated.’

Meleisea begins Chapter 11 with a discussion on whether ‘good governance’ values such as ‘openness and acceptance of human rights’ should be applied in non-Western countries which have their own customs and practices. He states that Samoa, in its 1962 constitution, attempted to blend ‘Western liberal principles such as individual rights, religious freedom, equality under the law and so on’ with the ‘Samoan system of chiefly authority...based on the idea that titleholders would represent the interests of the extended families who gave them their titles’. This combination, according to Meleisea, was satisfactory in 1962 but has become problematic almost 40 years on for various reasons which he outlines. He then ‘suggest[s] that [current] problems are linked to the fact that we [Samoans] are living in two worlds, a situation which is breeding a kind of moral confusion.’ Meleisea illustrates his hypothesis with a case study of the village in which he grew up, involving a conflict over a two-storey house.

Notes

1 See in particular Peter Larmour’s work in the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia discussion papers and publications, for example Larmour 1998a.
2 See, for example, the numerous Institute of Pacific Studies publications on politics in the Pacific.
3 See the Pacnews report entitled ‘Samoa has best track record of ADB-funded reforms’, 2 November 1999.
Codes of governance in the Pacific

Michael Goldsmith

Why has the term ‘governance’ achieved such prominence recently in discussions of economic development and political reform in the Pacific? The upsurge of governance terminology and literature, I argue, reflects the following four inter-connected factors.

• The so-called ‘doomsday scenario’ (Callick 1993; Fry 1994), a Malthusian prognosis which posits the worst-case outcomes of a number of worrying trends in Pacific Island states and societies (overpopulation, the growth of urban slums, declining rates of education, huge un(der)employment, infrastructural crises, and so on).

• The problem of so-called ‘weak states’, a phenomenon which was first noted in the context of post-colonial regression in Africa (Jackson 1990; Jackson and Rosberg 1982) and which denotes a state apparatus that cannot provide basic services to its citizens or assert its interests successfully against internal and external opposition. Increasingly, this concept is being applied to states in the Pacific (Dauvergne 1998; Larmour 1996).

• The undoubted, though perhaps slowing, ascendancy of neo-liberalism in both policymaking and rhetoric, in both local and global contexts and in relation to both developing and developed societies. This has taken such forms as an attempted Structural Adjustment Program in Papua New Guinea (Kavanamur 1998), Vanuatu’s Comprehensive Reform Program, and Upoko Tu in the Cook Islands (Mellor 1997), to cite only three examples.
• The apparent growth of corruption in Pacific societies over the last decade or so (Larmour 1997a; So'o 1998). The question arises as to whether this is really a separate factor or simply the practical evidence at a local level of the other three (compounding the ‘doomsday scenario’ by diversion of aid and suspension of legitimate aid programs; reflecting the problem of ‘weak states’ as expressed through deficiencies of law and order; and strengthening neo-liberal arguments against the role of governmental regulation because of the moral hazards this poses). Nevertheless, corruption looms large enough in discussions of developmental ‘failure’ to warrant attention in its own right.

These four factors are linked by a radical suspicion of the state and of entrenched political elites, a suspicion shared by commentators of different political persuasions (Frazer 1997; Hau’ofa 1987; Lafitte 1995; Luke 1995). And yet the state as an institution has not outlived its usefulness, even in the Pacific, where independent states are a relatively new but important phenomenon, and where state apparatus have been in existence, patchily but powerfully, for over a century (Larmour 1992). Specific states may currently face challenges from other states, but they have always done so; states may also have to relinquish some of their functions to other kinds or levels of organisation, but those functions have always been contested or in a process of evolution; finally, what may appear to be irreversible changes in the evolution of political institutions may simply reflect developmental lags and anachronisms in ‘international society’.

That a certain set of factors has come into play lending credence to the notion of governance, does not therefore mean that we should automatically see the concept as useful. Rather, we should treat individual cases on their own merits and not apply an explanatory framework, such as governance, without critical scrutiny. Thus, Larmour (1998a) convincingly distances the Australian National University’s ‘State, Society and Governance in Melanesia’ project from precisely this sort of uncritical usage of the terminology, not least because the project has encouraged a kind of internal auto-critique (for example, Macdonald 1995, 1997; Huffer and Molisa 1999).

There may be instances where the concept of governance makes good sense. At one extreme, for example, there is ample evidence that Papua New Guinea faces the prospect of the doomsday scenario, that it has a ‘weak state’, is riddled with corruption and requires large doses of
economic and political reform. It is difficult to govern, riven by regional and secessionist sympathies, subject to economic and fiscal crisis, hampered by enormous infrastructural problems, and vulnerable to depredations by multinational companies and venal politicians (Callick 1995, 1996; May 1998; Strathern 1993). If the catchphrase 'failure of governance' has become an accepted way of summarising such a situation, it would be churlish to disagree, though one can always question the implied need for neo-liberal solutions and structural adjustment programs in response.

At the other extreme, however, consider an atoll microstate like Tuvalu. Each of the four influences lying behind the rise of governance discourse assumes a very different hue in this case. If the doomsday scenario applies, it does so most pointedly from the threat of rising sea levels (an environmental threat not specifically addressed in the writings on the scenario's litany of troubles). If Tuvalu is a weak state, that is primarily because it is a very small state, not because the government has major problems exerting its control over its constituent parts (though transport and communication difficulties do put obstacles in the way). There may be a degree of corruption in business and political life but it is not significant. Taafaki and Oh (1995) are inclined to treat this as the price that tradition demands in terms of reciprocity. Finally, although the language of neo-liberalism is undoubtedly expressed in government offices at Vaiaku, and the public sector has been 'downsized', other criteria are absent. Government is still the largest employer (and likely to remain so), Tuvalu is still an almost classic MIRAB state1 and revenue generated from a Trust Fund donated by metropolitan countries contributes hugely to state expenditure (Kofe 1997; Paeniu 1995). Many of the same points and provisos apply to the neighbouring microstate of Kiribati (Macdonald 1996b, 1998).

My concern, then, is not so much in the applicability or otherwise of governance concepts to specific instances as with the dangers that surround the topic itself. There is a special danger, in much of the debate, of taking the meaning(s) of governance for granted, of automatically assuming that there is such a 'thing' to which the term corresponds.

Some etymology may shed light on the matter. First, note that 'governance' is an extremely old word in English, and undoubtedly even older in the Romance languages, stemming from the Greek kubernān 'steer' and Latin gubernare 'steer, direct, rule' (Onions 1966:407–8). The Oxford English Dictionary (micrograph edition, Vol. 1:1,181) attests to usages stretching back to the era of Chaucer in the late fourteenth century.
Already by that time it had a number of slightly different meanings. In slightly abridged and paraphrased form, the range of definitions includes:

- action or manner of governing; influence; state of being governed (well)
- office, function or power of governing; authority or permission to govern; that which governs
- manner in which something is governed or regulated, method of management, system of regulations
- conduct of life or business; mode of living, behaviour, demeanour (with connotations of discretion, virtue, wisdom, self-control).

Second, as the definitions show, governance is, and always has been, a morally and politically inflected word. In many instances, it has become fashionable to use ‘governance’ because of the positive connotations it brings in its train, as opposed to those conveyed these days by the etymologically and semantically very similar ‘government’. An interesting test in this regard is to inspect the usage of either word, specifically to see where the former could easily be substituted for by the latter. An example is Brian Easton’s recent use of ‘governance’ (1997) to translate the Maori term kawanatanga, one of the most contentious words in the Treaty of Waitangi and reportedly a neologism coined for the purposes of persuading Maori to become signatories. In the vast majority of mentions of kawanatanga before 1990, the word was translated as ‘government’ (for example, Williams 1971) and its reference took force from that very British colonial institution of the governor (known to Maori by the transliterated term te kawana). Yet Easton chose to translate it as ‘governance.’ This is not to say that the gloss is unjustified, just to say that the reasons for its increasingly common occurrence remain largely tacit.

To the extent that its meanings remain covert, therefore, ‘governance’ is a code word. My argument for this rather cryptic formulation draws on the following closely linked lines of analysis. First, it is a code word in the popular and slightly sinister sense of a term which disguises what it is ‘really’ trying to convey. It is a part of political rhetoric, which is full of instances of words being used to deflect attention. In certain speeches, for example, ‘democracy’ equals ‘capitalism’; in others, ‘family values’ is a way of disguising homophobia; and so on.

Second, it is a code word in the sense that if only we could understand the meaning of the term, and how to apply it, we could ‘crack’ one of the most puzzling codes in Pacific affairs, that is, the development code. To
put the metaphor slightly differently, 'governance' has become the latest candidate as a key to the frustratingly locked cabinet of material plenty and political stability. If we can understand the word 'governance' or apply it appropriately or repeat it often enough, the gates to development heaven will swing open. (Not all users of the term use it in such ritualistic ways, but for many the word has become a mantra.)

Finally, governance is also a code word in a broader sense borrowed from structural linguistics. That is, it plays a distinctive role vis-à-vis other words so that it has a specific value within a particular system of signs. As Saussure put it, ‘language is a system of pure values which are determined by nothing except the momentary arrangement of its terms’ (1966:80, 87). Sign systems are, after all, just codes in a technical linguistic sense. What is interesting, moreover, is that the codes are not completely under conscious or individual control (Barthes 1973). This lends weight to the argument above that the term has become ritualised. Users may not always know, for example, why they have chosen it in preference to ‘government’ but they know that it just sounds ‘better’ in current discourse.

Seen this way, it is possible to account for why ‘governance’ has tended to displace the word ‘government’. Starting as virtual synonyms, the two words have acquired different values over time, yet the meaning of one cannot be understood in isolation from the other. The presence of words in different but overlapping codes may also account for the ease with which Pacific Islanders (such as the members of the Samoan public interviewed by Huffer and Schuster, Chapter 3) attribute meanings to ‘governance’ that are not shared by the formulators of development policy. The example that sticks in my mind is ‘covenant’ as the meaning of ‘governance’, which is a perfectly understandable misreading, given the distinctive features of Samoan phonology and the importance placed on covenants in Samoan culture. An example of a more deliberate coding: if an agency or government in the Pacific couches the discourse of its aid program in terms of ‘governance’ (and certain words that signal part of the associated code, like ‘accountability’ and ‘transparency’) it is signalling that donors’ money will be spent efficiently and effectively, according to the donor’s standards.

‘Governance’ therefore operates as a code word by acting as a shorthand for such notions as ‘the weak state’, ‘corruption’ and so on. When an intergovernmental agreement or a government reform program refers to the need for ‘good governance’, it is often alluding to the fact that someone has been caught with their hand in the till or that lots of
money has flowed down a particular plug-hole without the desired effects, because the people to whom it was paid have neither the capacity nor the intention to use it effectively. References to ‘good’ or ‘bad governance’, in effect, serve the purpose of providing criteria for warranting whether particular states or regimes do or do not deserve official developmental assistance, loans or project investment.

A vivid and concrete instance of such behind-the-scenes certification was revealed by the leak of the notorious background briefing paper intended for the Australian delegation at the Forum Finance Ministers meeting in Cairns in early 1997. This ‘AUSTEO’ ('Australian Eyes Only') document used revealing phrases like ‘prudent Polynesians’, ‘best of the bunch’, ‘imprudent Micronesians’ and ‘Melanesian mayhem’ to characterise the Forum island states. The example is notable only for its revelations of backstage talk; discourse meant for public consumption is sometimes almost as judgmental.

To conclude, the upsurge in governance terminology and its linked preoccupations has had very real political and ideological consequences. Both the semantic and the material dimensions to which this argument refers are demonstrated by the intriguing fact that the term ‘governance’ has been co-opted by both ‘left’ and ‘right’, because both ends of the ideological spectrum harbour doubts about the desirability of the state, albeit in different ways.

Why? In part because the neo-liberal ascendancy has changed the nature of political and economic debates, at least in the short to medium-term. Even the Asian meltdown has not (as yet) generated a successful reaction of neo-Keynesianism. Few on the left are willing to pay uncritical homage to the state or to demand-side, interventionist economics any more. To that extent, the notion of ‘governance’—whoever uses it—connotes a rightward shift, simply because the terms of the political and economic development debate now orbit around a changed centre of gravity.

But I suspect there is another reason for this unlikely common cause. It is not so much a shared problematic as a matter of confusion over what the problematic is. Are we talking about ‘governance’ or ‘governmentality’? The latter term was introduced into modern social theory by Foucault to highlight the links between state control and individual subjectivity, external surveillance and inner discipline (Foucault 1979). Theorists of the left² seem to conflate the two terms more readily than do those of the right, who have generally avoided reference to ‘governmentality’. Part of this confusion and convergence may stem
from the fact that governance appears to be about transition. But transition from what to what, and from where to where? From a neoliber al perspective, as represented in the theories gaining ground in development circles, it is about a transition, usually trumpeted as desirable, from a more governed to a less governed society. On this view, we should all (citizens, workers, decision makers, business and political leaders, alike) move away from our dependence on government and the state to flourishing independence within a market-based civil society. Injunctions in favour of public service 'downsizing' by the New Zealand and Australian governments (including the AUSTEO document referred to earlier), as well as the economic prescriptions for Pacific Island countries laid down by the Asian Development Bank and World Bank, fit into this category. In the terms of yet another intellectual tradition, however, which is more traditionally associated with critiques of elitism and capitalism, we are in transition from a less governed to a more governed society (governed, that is, in terms of Foucault's notions of surveillance and disciplinary technology). This trajectory is not welcomed by the left but whether or not it can be resisted at least partly depends on one's reading of Foucault.

The whole issue of governance circles around what might be called the locus of control. The supposed devolution of responsibility for certain functions to the private sector and to non-governmental organisations illustrates this well. Neo-liberalism's concern to downsize the state is integral to the governance debate. Governance, however, is a discourse which shows traces of radical uncertainty and ambiguity about where and how control can be exercised. So 'governance' as a favoured concept seems to reflect a condition in which certain distinctions have come into question. The boundary between nation-states and the international society of globalisation appears blurred by the rise of multinational corporations; that between the state and civil society, by privatisation and divestment of many functions and organs of government; that between states and non-governmental organisations, by the greater effectiveness and willingness of the latter to tackle problems formerly seen as the preserve of the former; that between weak states and anarchic economies, by virtue of the fact that both may seem to operate by untrammelled forms of the market; that between traditional polities and 'modern' political systems, because the latter is not immune from the same deficiencies of social capital. Could it be, then, that the current fascination with governance doctrines in the Pacific is an expression of the wider confusions of late modernity?
Notes


2. Exemplars include Amin and Hausner (1997), Barry et al. (1996), and a spate of contributions to the journal *Economy and Society* in the 1990s by authors like Alan Hunt, Gary Wickham, Wendy Larner, Samantha Ashenden, Graham Burchill, and Barry Hindess.
The ‘good governance’ agenda pursued by aid donors and lenders has become an important condition for continuing aid. The agenda sets a series of ideal standards for performance in various areas of government and offers technical prescriptions for achieving them. The premise of the agenda is that it is possible to create a Weberian bureaucracy which will administer a set of rules impartially and dispense consistent outcomes. This overlooks a fundamental insight from early industrial sociology: that work exists and is performed in a sociocultural context. This chapter identifies impediments to the attainment of governance standards that are deeply rooted in the Samoan cultural context and will not be readily transformed in the short term by simple ‘technical’ measures.

The governance agenda
The World Bank has defined governance as ‘the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources’ (1992:1). It has three elements: the form of political structure, the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a state’s economic and social resources, the ability of states’ governments to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge functions (World Bank 1992:58).
These elements have been spelled out in more detail in a series of documents, principally from the World Bank, IMF and OECD member states, on the subject since the early 1990s.
Concern with good governance may be seen as an attempt to ensure that equitable development occurs and that the poorest people in the developing world enjoy the benefits of aid programs in the way that had been intended by donors from the outset. Seen in these terms, the 'good governance' agenda could be represented as a set of initiatives motivated by a desire to ensure that the apparent goals of donors and recipients—social justice and equity—are more effectively met. In this respect, the agenda appears to be a ‘technical correction’ designed to meet shared, publicly agreed upon moral imperatives.

Not all, of course, view the agenda in this way. Macdonald (1996a:4–5) has noted the policy is seen by some as a way of explaining the disappointing lack of progress which emanates from basic flaws in the donors’ policies; by others as a device for legitimating a reduction in the aid volumes; as a means of disciplining states which fail to provide the capacity for the implementation of projects; and a means of assuaging domestic discontent by those in donor states facing new austerity measures associated with economic restructuring. It is likely that the reasons for the World Bank’s initiative vary from one state to another, but the new policy constitutes a practical device for achieving publicly agreed upon aims.

There seems little doubt that the good governance agenda is around to stay. It seems likely too that donors will increasingly impose new conditions on their development assistance and that these will aim to meet certain basic standards in a range of areas outlined above. It will be increasingly difficult for states which seek financial aid to ignore these concerns. With reduced flows of aid, occasioned by weaknesses in donor states’ economies, changing geopolitical realities, and increased competition for available aid, those states which choose to ignore these new requirements will find themselves without the funds necessary to sustain their development programs.

The program

The remedies of the governance agenda, like the analysis, seem deceptively simple. First, they involve the creation, or amendment, of the legislative framework necessary to achieve standards in each of the three areas. The legislation necessary to define standards, and to provide checks and balances to ensure that these are met, can be created and enacted. Legislative models, which have been used successfully elsewhere to achieve particular objectives, are readily available to governments which seek to adopt them.
Second, it may involve the creation, or modification, of public management structures and procedures to ensure that the aims of legislation are met in practice in each of the three areas of governance. This is presented as a problem of locating ‘appropriate’ structures or, where necessary, designing new structures to implement the legislation. Again, it is contended, appropriate models, which have been shown to work elsewhere, are readily available to governments looking for them.

Third, it may involve the location and or training of officials to administer the legislation within these structures. This is again presented as a technical problem which can be solved by determining the necessary amounts of various types of training necessary to staff the public service and then by identifying individuals for this training, or retraining. Again, technical means of determining how many employees of a given type might be necessary to handle a given workload are readily available, and a range of types of training programs are available from a range of ‘training providers’ associated with national and international agencies. Because all of the ‘models’ necessary to achieve the goals and standards of ‘good governance’ are readily available, often in the aid donor’s country, the argument runs, there should be no impediment to any government which seeks to attain accepted standards of governance. Therefore, all states wishing to avail themselves of aid which is conditional on meeting the standards need only determine their objectives and implement them.

The above program, however, presumes that the values on which the objectives of ‘good governance’ rest are widely shared by the citizens of the state on which the program is imposed. It further presumes that a desire for ‘good governance’ exists and will emerge when the appropriate legal and administrative conditions are created. This chapter considers whether such a program will necessarily achieve the objectives. It argues that the resolution of legislative, administrative and human resources ‘issues’ will not necessarily produce the changes sought because this managerialist approach underestimates the importance of the role of culture in the success of good governance. This argument is outlined and explored in the case of Samoa.

**Governance theory meets Samoa**

Samoa became independent in 1962 in what is widely regarded as a model transition. Since 1962, the Constitution has enjoyed general acceptance and established a form of democratic, representative
government. It defines the rights and obligations of each, the means by which they are to be obtained, and checks and balances to ensure that these are not exceeded.

The public service was designed around models derived from other ‘modern’ states in the region, notably New Zealand, with which Samoa was most closely associated as a result of a constitutional relationship dating from 1914. The Public Service Commission was established to identify and quantify the government’s human resource requirements and to establish a program of training to ensure that appropriately trained Samoans were available to meet the needs of a ‘modernising state,’ and to locate the best qualified and most able candidates for positions. Human resource development programs which reflected the changing needs of a modernising economy replaced earlier ones as the state sought to develop its labour force.

The reality

On the surface at least, the preconditions of ‘good governance’ have been met. Yet, since independence, the framework of legislative, administrative and human resource programs of the new state has failed on a number of occasions to achieve the intentions of those who framed them. The most recent examples are a series of problems identified in a report, *Controller and Chief Auditor’s Report to the Legislative Assembly, Period 1 January 1993 to 30 June 1994*, by the Controller and Chief Auditor, Su’a Rimoni Ah Chong.

The report identified problems at all levels and throughout both the government and public service and raised serious questions about the extent to which the Samoan government has met, and indeed can meet, the criteria of ‘good governance.’ It also raised the question of whether a simple set of technical adjustments of the type proposed by the advocates of the governance agenda can transform conduct which is deeply rooted in a culture.

The Chief Auditor’s report

The Chief Auditor’s report identified factors which had prevented parliament from effectively exercising its right to scrutinise and authorise government expenditure.

Successive governments in the 1990s had not been held to account for their uses of public money. The report states
...the Public Accounts have not, at anytime in the past decade and three years prior to that, been prepared by Governments on a timely basis and forwarded to the Audit Office for auditing to allow tabling in Parliament on a timely basis as required by Act of Parliament; the Public Money Act 1964...

Timely financial reporting by Governments to Parliament, not years later, would enable Parliament to exercise its responsibilities more effectively on behalf of the Western Samoan people.

By way of elaboration of both the principle and the detail, the report then notes that the Constitution explicitly prohibits any expenditure of public money without an appropriation by Act of Parliament except, as provided for in Article 96 of the Constitution, for unauthorised expenditures of amounts of up to 1 per cent of the amount appropriated by the Appropriation Act for the year. He quotes an Attorney General’s opinion that

...article 96 is quite clear in its intent and meaning and a mockery is made of it each time Government blatantly spends more that the amount appropriated plus 1 per cent.

The Chief Auditor recommended changes in specific acts relating to public finances and public financial reporting, and in human resource development practice to ensure ‘good and competent people manage the affairs of the people of Samoa.’

To this point in the report the Chief Auditor seemed to be doing no more than discussing systemic weaknesses and offering fairly orthodox prescriptions, legislative refinement, systems modification, and human resource provision for solving them. It was, however, clear that he did not believe that these were the only problems or that the measures he proposed would ensure that quality information would be more readily available, and would allow ministers to act as they were required to by law. He pointed out very forcefully

The requirement to act within one’s lawful authority must be fully made clear to those responsible for managing public monies and public resources.

Government—cabinet and its Departments—cannot, in law, do anything they want!

This is a principle of enormous Parliamentary and Constitutional significance. My reason for drawing attention to this is the growing number of cases where the intentions or actions of some people suggest they either have no knowledge of the principle or have deliberately ignored it.
...the application by some people of their lawful authority appears to me to be unreasonable and would clearly produce results contrary to those for which that authority was intended to give.

Finally, there are people, including some Ministers of State and Departmental Heads and others, who simply do things without lawful authority at all! (p.11)

It is thus apparent that the Chief Auditor held serious reservations about some ministers’ knowledge of their constitutional rights and responsibilities, their willingness to accept these and the ways in which they exercised their authority. These conclusions are based on evidence of systematic abuses which are detailed in later sections of his report which deal with individual departments. In so doing, he raises important questions about the responsibility of leadership and governance which are concerned ‘specifically with...the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources’ (World Bank 1992:58).

**Transparent public service**

The Chief Auditor then reported on the audits of various government departments (sections 8.1–8.12); overseas missions (section 9); statutory bodies, corporations and public authorities (sections 10.1–10.11); and fully owned government organisations registered under the private sector companies law (section 11).

His report details theft of materials, favouritism, misappropriation, misuse of, and failure to account for government resources including labour, vehicles, housing and materials. These practices were common at all levels of government.

The lack of procedures in some cases, and their accidental or wilful neglect in others, left few effective checks on the exercise of power. Incomplete understanding of rights and responsibilities of offices in some cases and deliberate disregard in others, allowed individuals at all levels in government and the public service to exceed powers of office leading to even greater misuses of power and resources.

**Formulation, implementation and discharge of functions**

The report outlined a series of cases in which a lack of personnel, skills, and supervision meant that routine functions of government were not carried out. Thus, for instance, certain road works could not be completed because the heavy machinery required was being used to haul timber
In these sub-reports, the Chief Auditor presents evidence which raises serious issues about the final area of the governance agenda: the capacity of the government to ‘formulate and implement policies and discharge functions’ (World Bank 1992:58).

The Commission of Inquiry

The allegations contained in the Chief Auditor’s report were so damning that the Prime Minister moved that Standing Order 29(1) be suspended to allow its discussion by the Assembly, rather than by the Public Accounts Committee to which it would routinely have gone before it was discussed by the Assembly. After several days debate in the Assembly, the Prime Minister took the unusual move of seeking leave to have the report considered by a Commission of Inquiry. The Commission was established under terms of reference to comment ‘on all of the matters contained in the report’ and ‘to give opportunity to those whose performance of their functions and duties were mentioned in the report to respond to matters raised in the report’ (Commission of Inquiry 1994:3).

A seven-member Commission was appointed on 21 July 1994 and duly tabled its 78-page Report on the Controller and Chief Auditor’s Report to the Legislative Assembly on 20 October 1994. That report was discussed by the Assembly.

The Chief Auditor subsequently brought an action against the Legislative Assembly, the Attorney-General and the members of the Commission of Inquiry, alleging that the first two had acted unconstitutionally and that the terms of reference of the third were ultra vires. The defendants in turn sought ‘to strike out the causes of action contained in proceedings brought against them by the plaintiff’ which was heard by Chief Justice Sapolu in the Supreme Court on 18 and 19 October 1995. His judgement was made on 23 January 1996 (CP196/95).

The Chief Auditor was subsequently suspended on salary, Parliament amended section 97 of the Constitution to shorten the Auditor’s term from the year in which he or she turns 65 to three years from date of appointment.

The Commission’s Report

The Commission seems to have been particularly concerned that

The [Chief Auditor’s] Report does not confine itself to the simple and impassive reporting of information and situations discovered by the
Audit Office. It draws conclusions and reflects on the conduct of individuals and entities to the extent, in some cases, of registering verdicts in the areas of both law and morals. We examine this dimension of the report and the reasonableness or appropriateness of commentary not only from the point of view of justification but also from the standpoint of whether the Controller & Chief Auditor has mandate to engage in such pastime (p.7, emphasis in original).

The Commission of Inquiry explained why it enquired into the language in which the Chief Auditor made his points and the ways in which he constructed his allegations in particular

While reference in appropriate terms, to an emerging tendency is a common enough practice in any written report, the categorical clarity of expression employed and the starkness of the pronouncements, combined to make the latter appear to be statements of general reality, or to have a ring of truth which, in our view, is not adequately substantiated by the report (p.16).

However, the Commission of Inquiry concluded after exploration of this avenue that the problem resided not solely in the language because

...although the passages quoted above are, in our view, characteristic of the Controller & Chief Auditor’s tendency to use excessive and indulgent language, they are not entirely baseless. We examine elsewhere very serious occurrences within the Public Works Department and it is obvious that the Controller & Chief Auditor has drawn heavily on his discoveries there to conclude in the vein portrayed above (p.16).

The first section of Commission of Inquiry’s report deals with the cabinet and, in a somewhat veiled conclusion, seems to agree with the Chief Auditor’s conclusion.

Cabinet’s obligation to generally inform the Legislative Assembly and to lay before it specific matters prescribed by law is clear. Of greatest import however is the Cabinet’s obligation, as the predominant entity of power in our system of Government, to provide the Legislative Assembly and particularly the Opposition fullest opportunity to criticise government’s policies. This aspect is as vital to the system as anything else. Without it, the counter-balance that makes our bi-polar system not only work, but acceptable, will surely be lost and with it perhaps democracy itself (p.13, emphasis in original).

Indeed, it would have been difficult to conclude otherwise in view of the fact that for 13 years at least, Cabinet, by failing to provide accounts of the various entities under its control, had been able to deny Parliament the opportunity to scrutinise its expenditure and to monitor its performance in any systematic way.
The Commission of Inquiry’s Report then turns to the Chief Auditor’s observations on the ‘general terms which he perceives to be emerging in public sector financial management’ (p.14). The Commission of Inquiry picks eight passages from the Chief Auditor’s report including the following.

In our [Audit’s] view, it is fair to say based on the circumstances, that the public servants...have been ‘ politicised’, and as such there is no longer any checks and balances in place to safeguard against abuse and misuse of Ministerial power. Under these circumstances corruption and a variety of irregularities can easily occur which are difficult to detect (pp.15–16, emphasis in original).

Even after the Commission of Inquiry allowed that the acts may have been the product of particular set of historical and political circumstances, during which

Politicians, anxious to implement mandates of the people, were perhaps easily frustrated and impatient with less than instantaneous responses from the bureaucracy, or with enthusiasm which did not appear to match their own. Complete and immediate obedience was more acceptable and reassuring evidence of dedication to the implementation of the national development plans (pp.17–18).

The Commission of Inquiry acknowledged that while it may be sound policy to emphasise objectives rather than ‘ritualistic observation of procedure’, where such an approach

...is allowed to result in the wide scale abandonment of procedures and control systems, it becomes counter productive. Where an organisation’s main procedure consists simply of discovering what the Minister wants done and doing it without delay, such organisation can be capable of startling performance. In the long run however it is a formula for disaster. The Minister’s word becomes the only rule, and effective check[s], not only on the Minister but on everyone and everything else, go out the window....

In such circumstances discordant professional advice, to the extent that it may still exist, can very easily be treated as irrelevant. These circumstances put the future of balanced decision making in the public sector at grave risk (p.20, emphasis added).

At the end of this section, the Commission of Inquiry recommends

the establishment of a Code of Conduct for ‘leaders’ of this country, including Departmental Heads, to be administered by a three-man Leadership Commission. Codes help, not by making people or organisations moral but by removing ambiguity and setting minimum standards (p.21).
In summary, both the Chief Auditor and the Commission of Inquiry agreed that the standards of governance had significant shortcomings requiring immediate action. Both reports recommended courses of action. The Chief Auditor recommended the identification of areas of law which needed refinement, the establishment of better surveillance procedures, and the provision of the necessary human resources. The Commission of Inquiry recommended a code of conduct and a leadership commission to administer it.

In each of the three areas of ‘good’ governance: ‘the form of political structure, the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a state’s economic and social resources, the ability of states’ governments to design, formulate and implement policies and discharge functions,’ Samoa has problems which a donor country could use to justify a reduction or withdrawal of assistance (Macpherson and Macpherson 1998).

These are not severe problems compared with those of other third world states. This is not, however, the point. First, the state’s failure to meet criteria could be invoked at any time by one or more donors as the basis on which to withhold aid which is crucial to development. Second, even if the government were to determine today, to embark on a program to reform ‘problematic areas’, it is not at all clear that it would succeed for reasons which are beyond its control.

**Government action**

In the wake of the report, the Samoan government, particularly the Treasury, has taken a number of steps to prevent recurrence of the sorts of problems revealed in the Chief Auditor’s report, and confirmed in that of the Commission of Inquiry. An experienced, high-powered group at the top of Treasury have focused on providing the financial information necessary to meet the requirements of the Constitution of 1962 and the Public Moneys Act 1964 to provide timely accounts to the house to ensure that, in normal circumstances, the government’s—that is the Cabinet ministers’—actions and expenditures are subject to scrutiny and approval by the legislative assembly before they are spent. This involves the development of management information systems which will allow increased, continual monitoring and approval by Treasury of departmental spending.

The Treasury and the Audit Office have hired additional staff to examine accounts for all departments and agencies for the outstanding years up until 1994–95 for presentation to the House by December 1997. The Samoan Government has, with external assistance, also embarked
on programs of public sector reform and ‘institutional strengthening’
designed to ‘create a smaller public sector with a better defined role’
and ensure that Treasury and other key line departments are able to
provide timely accounts for parliamentary scrutiny and thus overcome
the serious issues raised in the Chief Auditor’s report. These programs
are defined in the document ‘A New Partnership: a statement of economic

Performance budgeting requires departments to specify the character,
costs, quantities and qualities of their outputs and to accept a contractual
obligation to deliver these through performance agreements applied
progressively to officers (Samoa 1996:5). Government accounts and
financial control will be restructured to devolve some Treasury functions
to departments which will become responsible for monitoring and control
of their own budgets (ibid:6). Information systems are being upgraded
to broaden the range of data collected, to improve its quality and the
government’s data analysis capacity to ensure that good information is
available for effective management of public resources (ibid:7).

The Public Service Commission’s role will be increasingly focused
on policy formulation and training and its current authority will be
devolved to departmental heads to give them greater freedom to manage
resources to achieve strategic missions and operational plans which they
will in turn define.

Development projects will in future be subject to comprehensive
economic, financial and environmental appraisal to assess viability. This
will involve strengthening the capacity to evaluate proposed projects by
a separate entity, the Planning and Policy Division of Treasury (ibid:7).

These are clearly focused, effective responses to acknowledged and
serious shortcomings in governance. Those involved in implementation
of the programs believe that these are already beginning to have an
impact at upper levels of departments and that this will permeate
through lower levels as the program proceeds. There is also evidence
that politicians are starting to feel the impact with Members of
Parliament complaining during the 1997 budget debate that
performance budgeting had made Ministers very ‘cautious’ and had
left them ‘unwilling to respond with Christian generosity’ to the ‘real
needs’ of the people as they had in the past.

While these programs and measures affect the government’s
performance, can these responses alone bring about the needed reforms
in the exercise of political leadership and the operation of the public
service to which the Chief Auditor drew attention?
Discussion

Will the good governance programs work in the ways that their proponents hope in Samoan society? Can they produce the model bureaucracy which Max Weber outlined almost a century ago and which underlies the good governance program? In Weber’s model officers with clearly defined and prescribed rights and obligations administered a body of law according to clearly defined procedures impartially and without regard to the status of, and their relationships with, their clients to provide consistent outcomes in all cases.

The remainder of the chapter argues that technical remedies will not work on their own. The social values and practices which underlie the ‘good governance’ agenda are not central to Samoan culture; in fact, they conflict with some central social values. This is not only our observation—it was noted in the Chief Auditor’s report. However, the Chief Auditor also proposed that both Christian principles and custom are used as convenient excuses, convenient explanations for a whole variety of things when careful analysis of the argument would show that it was seriously flawed.  

The argument

The models of organisation and organisational practice which underpin the ‘good governance’ program derive from Anglo-American management theory and rest on a world view which is not widely understood or supported in Samoa. The central tenets of ‘good governance’ conflict with those of Samoan social organisation. There are fundamental differences in the ways in which work in organisations and the origins and exercise of power and authority are understood.

The origins of the ideologies

The principles of ‘good governance’ are derived from a series of theories which assume the desirability of impartial administration that delivers consistent outcomes in a rational, efficient and transparent manner. The Samoan world view and lifestyle is revealed and reproduced in a variety of informal and formal contexts including the family, religious worship, formal education, discussions of the fono a matai (council of chiefs). These two ideologies conflict in several areas and these, we contend, will not be fixed with workshops.
Authority, rules and procedures

On the surface at least, the Samoan government embodies all the characteristics of bureaucratic authority which Max Weber established so long ago, such as, fixed and official jurisdictional areas ordered by rules; regular activities distributed in a fixed way as official duties; authority to give commands strictly delimited by rules; methodical provision made for fulfilment of duties and execution of corresponding rights; and people who have appropriate qualifications are employed (Weber in Gerth and Mills 1982:196).

But good governance requires a rational and transparent means of delivering outcomes consistent over time. This goal is undermined in Samoa by the relationship between work and non-work spheres and the nature of authority.

Work and non-work separation

There is no clear separation in Samoa between work and non-work spheres and the values and rules which govern each as envisaged in the Weberian model. The ‘good governance’ program dictates that work is a complex of activities defined by rules and performed in a social space called the office or organisation.

On the separation of the bureaucracy from the rest of social life, Weber writes

In principle, the modern organisation of the civil service separates the bureau from the private domicile of the official, and, in general, bureaucracy segregates official activity as something distinct from the sphere of private life. Public moneys and equipment are divorced from the private property of the individual....In principle, the executive office is separated from the household, business from private correspondence, and business assets from private fortunes (Weber in Gerth and Mills 1982:197).

Such a distinction does not exist for those who manage Samoan ‘aiga (kin groups). Those who perform wage or salary work remain members of the kin group and of a village, and are bound by the social obligations these memberships entail. Salaried work in both private and public organisations is always seen as embedded and subservient to social obligations that are rooted outside of the work space. Individuals cannot distance themselves from these networks.
The influence of Samoan culture in public administration

Broader social linkages enter the work sphere and come to influence decisions made there. These values generally conflict with those of administrative rationality because they derive from another rationality.

The significance of kinship

The kin group or 'āiga is a central feature of Samoan social organisation. Membership of the 'āiga confers rights and obligations on individuals, including the right to physical, moral and financial support, the prestige of association with a strong group, and in many cases access to a house site and agricultural land. In return members are bound to provide moral, physical and financial support to kin, and to serve the group in ways which contribute to the prestige of the group.

Individuals’ identities are defined by 'āiga. This concept derives moral authority from its occurrence in both Samoan custom and Christian teachings. For example, the customary saying that the 'hen resembles the chicken' is often equated with the biblical observation that 'good trees give good fruit and bad trees bad fruit', and both are cited as support for the concept that the individual and the 'āiga are inseparable. A strong, unified, kin group is likened to a fishtrap which is able to trap fish and to feed its members. Furthermore, people’s claim to membership will only be recognised by the group as long as their words are supported by their actions.

Great respect is shown to those who acknowledge the claims of their 'āiga and who contribute to all the kin-related events. Such people are known as osi 'āiga. Little respect is shown people who are le osi 'āiga or le mata 'āiga. Those who fail their 'āiga are often referred to critically as being fia palagi or wanting to be like the Europeans who are supposed to hold a set of values contrary to those of fa’asāmoa.

Tautua

A related principle of Samoan social organisation is that one serves, tautua, the matai (titled head of one’s family) and one’s parents and grandparents. Both Samoan proverbs and Christian scriptures are seen as supporting this idea. For instance, one proverb states that ‘service is the road to power’ while the Christian scriptures say ‘honour your parents all of the days of your life.’

A member of an 'āiga, then, is expected to place his or her resources which include poto (knowledge) and malosi (strength) at the disposal of
their family. In pre-contact Samoa and until the middle of this century, one served the matai and the ‘aiga by working on the family estate. Increased geographic mobility and the creation of a domestic labour market has led to some redefinition of the concept of tautua or service.

Tautua still requires that one’s resources are placed at the disposal of one’s family but this now includes wage labour in the public and private sectors. The range of resources available to the ‘aiga has expanded to include ‘intelligence’ and ‘strength’ derived from wage and salary employment. ‘Strength’, which would formerly have taken the form of labour, is commuted into either labour and cash or in some cases simply cash. ‘Intelligence’ now includes all sorts of information and service which are controlled by a person by virtue of employment. This may include knowledge, contacts, access to networks and so on. There is considerable respect for the individual who shows willingness to serve and, as noted above, service is the road to power in Samoan family life.

Reciprocity

Reciprocal obligations are central in Samoan social organisation and derive their moral authority from both traditional Samoan cultural and Christian value systems.

A person who accepts a favour, gift or service from another also takes on a responsibility to repay it at some time in the future. The exact debt incurred is unspecified and neither the form nor the amount of the repayment is specified at the time it is incurred. The situation is complicated by the fact that a debt is a ‘transferable’ one which can be passed from one person to another so that a debt owed to one individual may be claimed by another, usually related, person. This is complicated still further by the fact that such debts are incurred by an individual but become a debt of the collectivity. Thus, a debt incurred by an individual may be repaid by another member of the same group.

Respect for age

Samoan society is a gerontocracy. A person who behaves with appropriate deference to the elders is considered well brought up and one who fails is held to be le mafaufau (incapable of mature thought).

The exercise of power and authority

The second root of the problems evident in Samoan governance is the nature and exercise of authority. ‘Good governance’ rests on, as Weber
put it, ‘the characteristic principle of bureaucracy: the abstract regularity of the execution of authority which is a result of the demand for “equality before the law” in the personal and functional sense...the horror of “privilege” and the principled rejection of doing business from ‘case to case.’”

Within bureaucracy, power (the ability of one person to force another to comply) and authority (that is a person’s right to require another to comply) are derived from one’s position within the organisation, which reflects training, demonstrated competence in the skills required in a particular role, and willingness to accept certain central principles of jurisdictional competence. Other personal and social attributes will be irrelevant to the ways in which authority is exercised and reflected in decisions.

Authority in Samoan society

In Samoan society, power and authority rests with those who hold chiefly titles. Title holders exercise authority over the members and land of particular ‘āiga. Only people with matai titles can hold seats in Parliament, blurring boundaries between power derived from elected office and that derived from status as matai. The same is true in the public service where titled public servants enjoy power which derives from their office and from their status as matai.

Tension between these principles is demonstrated in case after case throughout the Chief Auditor’s Report. One senior bureaucrat defended his actions from charges by the Chief Auditor.

*We find it difficult to carry out our duties and responsibilities in accordance with the laws when there is this relationship between the Minister and requests from the villages. We have to carry out what the Minister instructs us to do.*

The Chief Auditor responded that the people who offer these explanations...

...must be clearly made to understand that they have specific Departmental functions and duties...and that the unguided application of the fa’a-Samoa and Christian principles...in such functions of Government would actually lead to corrupt and improper practices, to the detriment of the Government and its people (p.74, emphasis in original).

The prospect of change

The question of where the leadership for fundamental change would come from was canvassed by both the Chief Auditor and the Commission
of Inquiry. Both expressed doubts that technical remedies alone will be sufficient to provide good governance. Both came to the same assessment through different logical routes. The Chief Auditor notes that

...if the Government is to achieve responsible and productive management of the public resources under its trusteeship and care, Ministers of Cabinet and Heads of Departments need to lead by example and show the rest of those within the service of Government, under their leadership, influence and control, what responsible and productive management and leadership is all about (p.55).

It is simply not possible to achieve responsible and productive management within Government, if some Ministers of Cabinet and Heads of Departments habitually violate Government policies and procedures and the laws set down by Parliament, for Government to operate within (p.55).18

The Commission in turn notes

...as enunciated by knowledgeable people in the field of Public Administration, the environment as provided by the influential institutions such as Parliament, professional associations, the Courts, the Churches, the Media, village councils and the public in general all impact on the central institutions of administration. It is unrealistic to expect high ethical standards of administrators if there is little evidence of such in the wider community (p.21, our emphasis).

Much needed leadership must come from the top of the public service because there is no pressure within the community at large for such ethical standards. In some respects, however, it may be an inevitable consequence of the ways in which the electoral system has evolved since independence and because of the situations of those who work in the public service.

**Structural impediments**

Winning parliamentary office requires large expenditures (So’o 1998) which in some cases exceed annual parliamentary salaries. Those who hold parliamentary office seek to recover their own investment and reward their ‘supporters’. Second parliamentary terms cannot be guaranteed so investments must be recouped in the first term.

Similar pressures are at work in the public service where salaries are relatively low and where workers are under pressure to ‘serve’ their immediate and extended families.

These practices require either fundamental changes in attitudes and values which are central to Samoan society and/or changes in the organisational structure of both the electoral system and public service.
Both changes are under way and those in the public sector management are well advanced. The institutional strengthening program mentioned above has drawn on best practice in New Zealand, Australia and international agencies such as the World Bank to achieve better performance by various means.

A first change has been the strengthening of checks and balances in the public service financial management procedures which have effectively limited certain activities. As the costs of computing hardware and software drop the costs of creating these checks will decrease. These checks are, however, only useful as tools when managers are disposed to use them.

The second measure has been to empower public service managers to recruit their own staff and make them accountable for their performance. Performance related contracts give managers the very best reason for monitoring their departments' performance and looking for staff and procedures which will allow them to meet more clearly specified outputs.

The third strategy has been to motivate and train managers. Some 100 managers have completed the Diploma in Public Sector Management and a sixth intake of senior managers began the course in November 1998. What other forces might bring about such attitudinal changes and electoral and public management reforms?

**Aid donors**

Aid donors can exert some pressure to ensure that good governance practices are followed. However, aid donors can only exert so much influence and may have little option in many cases but to accept assurances that progress is being made on the good governance agenda.

**Foreign investors**

As the Samoan government looks to attract foreign direct investment it will encounter increasingly demanding foreign investors who will invest only where they find conditions in which they can work predictably and profitably. In May 1999 the OECD, in response to the East Asian financial crises, launched a Code of Good Corporate Conduct which OECD Director-General Donald Johnston described as the 'cornerstone for attracting foreign investment into the developing world' (*New York Times* 29 April 1999).
If the Samoan government is to attract investors in an increasingly cautious investment market, it will need to be able to assure potential investors of the transparency of procedures in both public and private sectors. The new Prime Minister’s commitment to attracting foreign direct investment may be a powerful incentive to move in this area.

The academy

The recent establishment and growth of the National University of Samoa will concentrate a group of people whose professional training has made them articulate critics of certain practices and capable advocates of alternative models of governance. Many of the faculty have spent time outside Samoa and have alternative visions of governance in Samoa. Their willingness to be critical, however, may be compromised by the University’s dependence for funding on the government.

Commercial sector

Corruption in government imposes costs on business that may foment opposition especially as the business sector does make huge profits in Samoa.

The public service

Leading and well-educated Samoan public servants are well aware of their official responsibilities and are committed by professional ethics and now by performance contracts. However, as long as many public servants have greater incentives to ignore the existence of boundaries between the office and other spheres of life, the bureaucracy will fail to meet the standards of the good governance agenda. Measures which are intended to guarantee performance and accountability provide governments with ‘legitimate’ excuses to rid themselves of critics.

One difficulty faced by the public service is retention of human capital. In the past, skilled personnel have become frustrated with the system and have left (Macpherson 1984, 1985).

The mass media

Although the government-owned radio and television stations and the government newspaper are unlikely to get beyond broadcasting government ‘triumphs’ privately owned media, such as the Samoa Observer newspaper and Islands Business magazine have continued to provide critical commentary despite threats from some in government.
The days of tight internal controls over the media are rapidly ending. The Internet and fax services enhance the capacity for government failings to be broadcast internationally to audiences that can bring pressure to bear on governments in a variety of forums.

**Non-governmental organisations**

The growth of non-governmental organisations and other institutions of civil society which are encouraged by governance programs may focus their attention on the malpractices of the parliamentarians and public servants.

Samoa has various organisations, such as the Law Society, Accountants' Society and the Chamber of Commerce which are well placed to advocate and promote legislative and regulatory changes in public and private sector administration. The labour movement may also have an interest in clarifying the conditions under which their members work.

Beyond Samoa such organisations as Transparency International (a non-political, non-profit, non-governmental organisation) have established branches which according to founder Peter Eigen, seek to bring about changes ‘in laws, institutions and policies that will drastically reduce the incidence of corruption in the future’ (*Islands Business* March 1998:35). Recently the Samoan chapter of Transparency International worked to publicise the Samoan government’s amendment of the Constitution which increased its control over the office of the Chief Auditor. The power of such organisations is that they gather information from inside a country and broadcast it internationally.

**The population at large**

Could the impetus for change in the performance of politicians and public servants come from the people who daily encounter the shortcomings of governance? We share the pessimism of the Chief Auditor and the Commission of Inquiry about the prospect of this occurring.

**Conclusion**

There is increasing pressure for the adoption of new standards of public and private sector administration. This pressure is exerted by aid donors and foreign investors who seek assurances that the conditions for aid and investment meet certain notional standards. They provide codes of
practice and various training programs to enable Samoans to meet the standards.

The good governance agenda prescribes the displacement of certain cultural practices from public and private sector workplaces. This process is neither rapid or simple. It requires people to accept that work spaces are separate from the rest of lived space and are governed by distinct norms.

**Toward a self-fulfilling prophecy**

While Samoans in general are cynical about their politicians and public servants and their ability and desire to deliver fair, impartial outcomes by standardised procedures, they are also resigned to the pervasive influence of Samoan values and practices in both spheres. This is not to say that they do not believe that politicians and public services can deliver fair, impartial and consistent outcomes in similar circumstances. Those who have been overseas point to public services elsewhere as examples of how a public service can deliver a fair and impartial service. As one woman who had just dealt with a government office noted

> At government offices in the US and Australia, you just go in a take your number off the machine and then wait until you are called. In those offices you can see all the people waiting: the people with suits and shiny shoes and the people with shorts and no shoes, people from town and people from the rural areas. That's good. All people are treated the same: rich people and poor people and important people and ordinary people, even pastors and their charges. But do you think you could make a system like that work in Samoa? Never in a thousand years. Samoa runs according to the fa'aSamoa.

Samoans do wish that their government and public service could deliver more consistent, fairer outcomes.

The cynicism evident in these reflections can set the ground for a self-fulfilling prophecy. It leads people to act as if the system cannot change, and in so doing, they act in ways which reproduce the very features of the system which they would like to change.
Notes

1. In the Pacific for instance, UNDP Suva has launched a five-year program with an agent moving around offering Pacific Island governments ‘technical’ help with developing governance programs (see for instance *Samoa Observer* 24 June 1997:4).

2. As of July 1997, Western Samoa officially became Samoa.

3. This apparent satisfaction with the Constitution has been attributed to the extensive consultation process and to the participation by Samoans in the drafting and ratification of the document.

4. A series of reports into various areas of government activity punctuate the period since independence.

5. This office, established by the Constitution, will be referred to from here on as the Chief Auditor.

6. Two of those appointed initially, the Attorney-General, Tupa’i Se Apa, and Oloipola Terence Betham, promptly resigned. The Attorney-General was re-appointed to the Commission as Counsel assisting the commission and the other member was replaced.

7. The final composition of the Commission of Inquiry was itself a cause of complaint for the Chief Auditor who pointed out that the Attorney-General and the Secretary to Government were in the course of their duties clearly connected with the executive arm of government and that the chair of the commission, the ombudsman, was the subject of allegations in the initial report. As Chief Justice Sapolu noted, ‘the clear inference is that these public office holders should not have been involved in the commission of inquiry’ (Judgment of Sapolu CJ, C.P.196/95:5).

8. He noted for instance that those who suggested that his inquiry into the theft of cement was contrary to the ‘principles of Christianity’ appeared to have overlooked the biblical commandments on both love and theft respectively!

9. All individuals may claim links with at least four ‘aiga but will identify with one of these, usually that with which they spent their childhood and youth, as an itu malosi, or strong side, and will recognise that group’s claims first.

10. *O le ala ile pule ole tautua.*

11. Genesis 20:12, ‘ia e ava i lou tama ma lou tina ina ia fa’alevaleva ai ou aso i le nu’u o le a foaaina mai e le Alii lou Atua ia te ‘oe’.

12. Samoans distinguish between tautua matavela (willing service) and tautua tomumu or tautua paa’a (grumbling or reluctant compliance).

13. The requirement of service was directly connected with the fact that one derived one’s livelihood from the family’s estate, thus a direct exchange element underlay the expectation of service. This connection has been severed with wage employment but this is not reflected in the concept’s meaning.

14. As for instance in Matthew 5:44; Mark 12:33.
15 With the proliferation of titles which occurred with the transformation of the electoral system following independence the authority of many titles has been eroded to some extent as the nature and extent of their authority becomes more widely contested.

16 Two seats are reserved for ‘independent voters’ and may be held by persons who do not hold *matai* titles.

17 It should be noted that the Chief Auditor believed that the factors had, in this case, ‘been presented as a convenient excuse for the unlawful and improper events that have been carried out’ (p.74).

18 On p.65 he makes a similar point which bears more directly on the governance agenda. ‘While the Audit Office is trying...to assist the Department by establishing proper controls and accounting systems and training personnel responsible on how these should be operated, the most crucial factors...are top management’s support and integrity. Without these, the exercise may very well be a ‘voice in the wilderness.’

19 This course is part of the New Zealand ODA capacity building and institutional strengthening program offered in Samoa for public sector management. Such in-country training modules have the advantage of bringing programs to Samoa and making the material and training exercises more relevant to the situations in which the graduates work daily.

20 In mid-1997 people from Vaiusu in the Faleata District, constructed barricades which were patrolled by armed villagers around a piece of land which villagers claimed a politician had promised to return to them. While the events were covered in the *Samoa Observer*, in New Zealand newspapers, and on the Internet they were not mentioned in government media which focused instead on ministers opening containers of donated medicines.
Although the mixing of traditional and democratic procedures, practices and values by politicians and their supporters, for political purposes, is generally perceived by the public as degrading, it nevertheless reflects the present status of politics in Western Samoa, and suggests what to expect in the near future (So‘o 1996:327, our emphasis).

International institutions call for Pacific nations to look at the notion of governance in a manner that presupposes a flaw in existing political structures and practice. Governance has been described as ‘a polite way of raising awkward issues of corruption, incompetence and abuse of power’ (Larmour 1998c:4). Leading the calls is the World Bank which, together with UNDP and donor countries in the Pacific, has channelled a notable portion of its financial capacities towards programs that seek to encourage and strengthen a more pervasive and decentralized participation of society (or at least of civil society)1 in decision-making processes (see Chapters 4, 5, and 6 in this volume; Helu 1997; Huffer and Molisa 1999).

In spite of appearances, the drive for good governance stems from a concern with economic failure rather than with political reform. It results directly from the IMF and the World Bank’s ineffective imposition of structural adjustment packages in developing countries in the 1990s. Economic reforms that were designed to enhance growth have stumbled, due mainly, according to the World Bank and other donors, to the mismanagement of funds by state authorities in developing countries (World Bank 1989b). The message put forward by the good governance
agenda is therefore ambiguous: although it reflects a concern with political set-ups and management, it does so primarily for the sake of economic development. In fact, had economic development been successful in Sub-Saharan Africa, it is doubtful governance, as put forward by its main proponents, would have been ‘invented’.

The good governance agenda seeks to impose a formula much as structural adjustment reforms have done. Williams and Young (1994:99) have described the ‘formula’ as ‘at the institutional level the creation of a neutral state; at the social level the creation of a public sphere or civil society; and at the personal level the corresponding creation of a liberal “self” and “modern” patterns of behaviour.’ The formula resembles liberal representative democracy in its most basic form. The governance agenda does not promote a discussion on better political representation and participation, or on better democracy.

The agenda, as developed by the World Bank itself, identifies three areas of concern:

• the form of political regime
• the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources
• the design and capacity of governments to design, formulate, and implement policies and discharge functions (World Bank 1992:1).

Similarly, in its Governance for Sustainable Human Development in the Pacific Islands Project, the UNDP outlines the following objectives.

• Greater clarity and understanding of the role and purpose of government, and understanding by citizens, NGOs, oversight bodies, politicians and officials.
• Chang[ing] the culture of public organisations through development of competence and performance standards, and creating consequences for performance.
• Improved accountability between public organisations and clients.
• Improved governance (including use of donor resources) by increased knowledge (UNDP 1996).

Although to most people the above ‘governance-talk’ might appear nebulous if not downright obtuse, it demonstrates international institutions and donors’ concern with fundamental decision-making processes and public access to them, in the developing world, for the purpose of better economic management. It also points to a familiar wave
of imposed ideologies such as structural adjustment and institutional liberal democracy.

Samoan government rhetoric points to an acceptance of the governance discourse despite the potential difficulties the good governance agenda may pose for kin-based societies such as Samoa (see Chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6 in this volume). At an IMF regional conference in Apia, Samoa’s Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi highlighted his government’s commitment to reform and emphasised the concerns raised in the governance agenda.

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The Samoan government’s focus on good governance coincides with that of the proponents of the good governance agenda: institutional reform to better promote economic development along free-market lines. It steers clear of the idea of political reform for its own sake.

But what is governance to the layperson in Samoa? And why does it or rather should it have any relevance to someone in Falealupo2 or in any other part of Samoa? If we accept that at least one potential feature of governance could be to promote the empowerment of various levels of the polity to respond to emerging economic, social and political conditions,3 it may be of relevance to the population at large. There is indeed agreement in Samoa as in other democracies, that the responsibility for decision making and contributing to the processes of decision making must come from all sections of society. In other words, political management should allow for more direct participation by a wider cross-section of society.

This is similar to the view put forward by Calame and Talmant, who define governance as ‘...the capacity of human societies to give themselves systems of representation, of institutions, of processes, of social bodies, to manage themselves in a voluntary movement’ (Calame and Talmant 1997:19). Huffer and Molisa also defend this conception of governance in a study of Vanuatu, stating that one of the opportunities afforded by the new emphasis on governance is to ‘review and transform,
where necessary, rules, laws and institutions, both customary and introduced so that they become more relevant to today’s context’ (1999:11). We could also add that it is a chance to review existing ideologies.

The recent attention to governance then may provide an opportunity to review Samoans’ interaction in the polity. If new forms of political participation and are to be developed then they must draw on principles and norms that are acceptable to Samoan society.

What are the Samoan norms and values with which the governance agenda must articulate? How is governance perceived in Samoan society? The purpose of this chapter is to review the contemporary political context in Samoa and present the views of Samoan observers on governance.

Contemporary Samoa

The Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) government, led by Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi, has held power for the greater part of the past 16 years. The HRPP won the elections in 1982, 1985, 1988, 1991 and 1996, and commands some two-thirds of the Parliament’s 49 seats. Its success in maintaining power is attributed, by local observers, to various factors: the inability of the leader of the opposition, Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese, to muster widespread popular support, and to effectively lead his party, the Samoan National Development Party (SNDP); the HRPP’s ability to fulfil its main electoral promises; the latter’s hold on the state apparatus enabling it to reward its electors, and its gift-giving practices during electoral campaigns.

Thus, although during the past decade Samoa has had two main parties, which have competed for the control of the National Fono a Faipule, the SNDP has been unable to provide a strong opposition in Parliament. This has led to a situation where the current government holds more than a two-thirds majority and is able to amend the constitution and pass laws with restricted debate. The character of debate in Parliament itself has deteriorated with undignified and often unsubstantiated accusations flying across the floor and being broadcast over the radio to a sometimes shocked public.

In the past few years, the Samoan government has come under criticism over various issues such as the non or under-reporting of public accounts, the mounting sales of Samoan passports to non-Samoan citizens, unethical campaigning strategies in national elections, its application of pressure and threats on local media and its pervasive
influence over the public service. Concurrently, over the past decade, the government has initiated changes, such as the introduction of universal suffrage and the establishment of a Ministry of Women’s Affairs, which tend towards greater institutional democracy. As part of a social welfare policy, pensions and free public transport were made available to Samoa’s senior citizens, 65 years and over. The roads linking rural villages to urban centres on ‘Upolu and Savai‘i have been resurfaced and rural electrification and telecommunications have provided a more comfortable environment previously lacking in rural Samoa. The face of Apia has changed dramatically with the development of several high-rise buildings funded by China and Japan and which house government ministries and the Central Bank of Samoa.

For many Samoans, these ‘marvels’ of modern Samoa are a fulfillment of government’s concern for its people. They are a realisation of promises made by the government during election time and suggest a government working for its people. For other Samoans, particularly those who have supported the protests led by Tumua ma Pule ma Aiga, the government has become ‘dictatorial’, abusive and corrupt. One of the more significant concerns raised by Tumua ma Pule ma Aiga is the government’s pervasive influence over the state apparatus, and its tendencies to believe it has absolute sovereignty. The government’s disregard for the opposition has over the past few years led Tumua ma Pule ma Aiga to adopt ‘traditional’ or non-parliamentary ways of fighting back.

The ambivalent perceptions in Samoa of the actions and role of the government raise questions about how the current political system responds to the demands placed on it by rural and urban people. This, in turn, raises considerations about the fundamental expectations of Samoan society with regards to its participation and role in governance. It was in this context that the authors conducted interviews of a cross-section of citizens of Samoa to gain insight of the latter’s view of governance.

An expression of governance in Samoa

Over a three week period in January–February 1998 we interviewed 26 respondents ranging from government ministers including the then Deputy Prime Minister, members of Parliament, church ministers, village authorities, leaders of non-governmental organisations, academics, teachers and youths. Because the survey was not quantitative the answers we collected do not necessarily provide a comprehensive
view of governance by Samoans. Nonetheless, we chose respondents from a cross-section of society to allow people with different backgrounds and perspectives to express their opinions, and to get an understanding of the range and differences of views on the topic. We have not sought to divide answers according to people’s background, gender or age but to give an overview of our respondents’ answers. We have occasionally outlined differences in answers given by rural and urban-based citizens when significant.

We asked all the respondents the following questions

• What is governance?
• What is good governance?
• What is bad governance?
• If and where there are breakdowns in governance, what are their causes?
• What are the remedies to breakdowns in governance?

We also asked the respondents which institutions they thought were best able to cope with the contemporary political, economic and social conditions in Samoa. Interviews were conducted in English and Samoan, depending on the context and the wishes of the respondents. They took place in Apia and Uafato on ‘Upolu, and Salelologa and Asau in Savai‘i.

Interpretations of governance

Only three respondents stated that they had never heard of the word governance, while a fourth mistook the term for another. Most respondents were not initially very clear about the term. One said he had read about it. Another stated she had heard about it in workshops. A third admitted that he had ‘only heard it rarely’ but that it was ‘associated with government’ and ‘had appeared because of aid from overseas, especially from Australia and New Zealand.’ A long-standing civil servant complained that it was a ‘confusing and relative term’ that is ‘insufficiently clear’ and ‘can be used in many ways’ thereby ‘creating difficulties for government departments.’ An academic felt that it was too complex a word and that it was difficult for Samoans to convert it into their own language. However, a headmistress and a teacher we interviewed in Savaii thought they could translate it as pulega.

Definitions of governance varied according to whether the respondents were rural-focused or urban-focused. The rural-focused, that is, people based and integrated in rural areas, gave the following definitions of governance
• ‘the undertaking of village projects’
• ‘unanimity, with no dissent’
• ‘governance is carried out through the matai system’
• ‘pule’aga, leadership, way of controlling people and events.’

The urban-based respondents gave the following definitions

• ‘the process of ruling’
• ‘how people are governed from the family to the village council to Parliament’
• ‘in Samoa, governance is the family, the village, the women’s committees, the traditional districts, the Constitution, Parliament’
• ‘the structure of government, the separation of powers, administration of government departments, the interaction between the executive, legislative and the judiciary’
• ‘how people are managed and organised’
• ‘ways of managing the society but the family is at the centre of governance’
• ‘the Matai system, how the system works, deliberating and deciding how everyone lives’
• ‘the way people in power conduct the affairs of the people they govern’
• ‘how one controls, looks after that which he or she is responsible for.’

Two respondents gave what could be considered definitions of good governance in their definitions of governance

• ‘leadership, truth, taking on responsibility’
• ‘integrity, and awareness of and compliance with ethical operating standards and respect for the law.’

Interpreting the interpretations: governance

Not a single respondent mentioned the articulation between government, civil society and the private sector, which is central to how the international organisations and donor countries, which have been pushing the good governance agenda, view governance and good government. Why this is so can be found in some of the definitions given by the respondents themselves, for example, ‘how people are governed from the family to the village council to Parliament’ or ‘in Samoa, governance is the family, the village, the women’s committees, the traditional districts, the Constitution, Parliament.’ Although there is
a distinction between the national institution of government, the Malo, represented by Parliament and Cabinet, and local or village administration represented by the fono a le nu'u, both are part of a continuum or a 'whole' which links the family, the village fono, the traditional districts and the national Fono. The latter’s existence and legitimacy depends on the matai system, which is at the heart of governance in Samoa. In such an organisation it is difficult to distinguish between civil society and government outside, perhaps, the urban context of Apia, where non-governmental organisations are becoming better established.19

At the same time, the lack of distinction or separation between government and civil society means that, in some ways, government, in the sense of management of public affairs, is pervasive or all encompassing. It is present from the family to the national Fono (although of course family governance and parliamentary governance are differentiated because they do not affect people in the same way, nor do they have the same functions). Little distinction is thus made between the private sphere and the public sphere, which is an important concept in liberal democracy, and which allows greater scope for dissent, non-conformity and articulation of difference. This would in part explain the respondents’ emphases on governance as a process of ruling, managing or organising people, as if a pre-existing higher authority (or system) is there to manage the people. There was no significant difference in the responses of the urban-based versus rural-based respondents nor according to gender or generational differences.

Views of good governance

Most of the respondents did not have a single definition for good governance but rather listed two, three, or more ‘attributes’ which combined to constitute good governance. The most frequently raised ‘attributes’ were accountability, mentioned six times (by respondents holding positions of high responsibility in various fields) and individual or human rights (including freedom of expression) mentioned five times.

Accountability

Only two respondents out of six attempted to define accountability. One stated that it is ‘the government saying what it is doing and why it is doing it, as much as possible’ and the other that ‘government needs to
have a code of ethics and needs to be particularly accountable with respect to ministers having private business interests.’ Another two respondents coupled accountability with ‘openness’ and ‘transparency.’

**Human rights**

Those who equated human rights with good governance provided the following definitions: ‘people being informed of their rights,’ ‘respect for human rights,’ ‘people being free to question the government and leaders being open to criticism’ and ‘the freedom to express one’s opinion without political or religious suppression.’ Two participants also mentioned a ‘good and open free press’ as constituting good governance, while two mentioned the importance of information: ‘people need to be aware of what’s going on’ and ‘there needs to be a dynamic dissemination of information.’

**Consultation and participation**

Consultation was raised five times while participation was mentioned four times. Definitions of participation given were

- ‘the participation of the church, family and community, not just the government’
- ‘a system in which leaders and members can act formally and informally to reach goals’
- ‘not governing from the top down but having the whole community participate’ and
- ‘administration and management which takes into account the feelings, ideas and expertise of a cross section of the people for the benefit of all.’

**Equality, sharing and serving**

The idea of equality, which was linked to sharing, was raised by four respondents.

Only two respondents specifically mentioned ‘serving.’ One said: ‘the values of Samoan governance are to be productive so as to be worthy contributors to the community.’ The other stated that good governance is ‘a relative concept’ and that in Samoa it means, ‘serving the group.’

**Good management and development**

Four respondents mentioned good management as a criterion of good governance. Definitions of good management were varied
• ‘a government that looks after the interests of people socially as well as economically’
• ‘the practice and execution of responsibilities and duties with observation of standards’
• ‘proper management for the people’ and
• ‘a government that is efficient in its delivery of services and cares about quality and professionalism.’

Two respondents specifically mentioned ‘good development’ which includes ‘going out to the grass roots to see what they need’ and ‘taking advantage of opportunities for development,’ as illustrations of good governance.

Law and order, and contextual appropriateness

Three respondents, all rural-based, respectively equated good governance with ‘respect for law and order,’ ‘maintaining law and order,’ and with ‘when the community obeys the decisions of chiefs and orators.’

Two respondents mentioned ‘having a system that is appropriate for the context it functions in’ and ‘taking into account the customary arena’ as criteria for good governance.

Other definitions

Other definitions of good governance which were given only once include

• ‘consensus’
• ‘working hard and earning your living’
• ‘wisdom of the fono’
• ‘cooperation and working hard together for the achievement of objectives’
• ‘communication using appropriate language’
• ‘flexibility and accommodation, leaving a leeway for compromise’
• ‘fair justice’
• ‘integrity of voters,’ and
• ‘giving the people what they want, be it material benefits or freedom if that’s what they want.’

One respondent stated that good governance ‘would be if the Chief Auditor had been able to do his job and if the government had acted upon it.’
Interpreting the definitions: good governance

From the above answers, it appears that most of the respondents equated good governance with openness, publicity and communication, with those based in rural areas focusing more on obedience and law and order. The emphasis on law and order in rural areas reflects Samoan conceptions of obedience and understanding status and responsibility in society, echoed in a prominent saying in Samoan oratory: ‘O Samoa ua uma ona tofi’ (‘Samoa has already been divided’).23 Many respondents implicitly emphasised values of fairness and justice. Only two raised the notion of ‘serving’ which brings into question the traditional Samoan notion that ‘participation is service’ (So’o 1996:283). None of the respondents thought of governance in institutional terms.

Differences in attitudes and expectations between our urban-focused and our rural-focused respondents were marked. In rural areas, the most important factor in governance is that peace prevails therefore obedience is considered essential.24 In urban areas, where people live in a more varied context, they feel a need for more consultation and participation in the decision making process from which they are further removed than if they were in a rural context. Also there appears to be a greater diversity of opinions due to greater access to ideas and information from multiple sources.

Defining bad governance

Over half (14) of the respondents equated bad governance with the government overstepping its powers in one way or another, including through corruption, nepotism, favoritism, ‘ignorance or avoidance of compliance with set standards,’ ‘abuse of powers,’ ‘taking advantage of peoples’ lack of knowledge,’ ‘not tolerating criticism,’ ‘dominating media,’ ‘seeking to undermine civil rights,’ ‘suppressing peoples’ freedom to express their views,’ ‘being secretive and withholding information,’ ‘denying rights of minorities,’ ‘being motivated by factors other than general welfare,’ ‘not having provided public accounts for eight years’ and ‘chiefs feeling that their decisions are right and supreme.’

Five respondents defined bad governance as lack of participation and consultation. Two respondents mentioned a ‘weak opposition.’ Other definitions given were: ‘trying to live in the past,’ ‘friends being
considered more important than the truth,' 'selfishness and laziness,' ‘leaders’ decisions being seen as not firm or changing all the time,’ ‘disobedience within the village,’ ‘violence,’ ‘disorder,’ ‘when a village council argues all the time when making decisions,’ and ‘an unresponsive government which is unacceptable to the people.’

In conclusion, well over half of the respondents equated bad governance with bad government.

**Causes of breakdowns in governance**

We asked respondents whether they thought there were breakdowns in governance and if so, what were the causes of these breakdowns. The 26 respondents answered positively. Although they each gave various reasons for breakdowns in governance, 18 of them mentioned the attitude of leaders at least once. Other reasons given in order of frequency were: problems of articulation between ‘customary’ and ‘modern’ values and systems (mentioned 8 times); governmental abuse of power and position (8); corruption (6); the role of the church (4); the role of political parties (4); a weak opposition (3); education (3); people’s attitude (3), and cost of living (2).

**Leadership**

The comments made about leadership included the following: ‘leaders were looking for personal gain instead of leading,’ ‘*matai* are seeking for themselves,’ ‘people get in power with a limited vision, they don’t have a vision of good governance nor a sincere wish to implement it,’ ‘leaders are not going back to the people and finding out what is needed and this has been going on for a long time,’ ‘politicians are making mistakes and trying to hide them for fear of not being re-elected,’ ‘politicians are not grasping that their role is to serve and they feel they don’t have to obey laws,’ ‘leaders are using their status to promote their own families,’ ‘leaders act as though they are superior in their thinking,’ ‘in some villages, the top does not seek the opinions of all and sometimes the ministers and *matai* look down on people,’ ‘the Speaker of Parliament’s attitude discourages debate in Parliament and Members of Parliament use their titles to squash debate,’ ‘under the colonial administration people were just governed with the attitude that ‘we are the rulers, you are the ruled,’ but in spite of decolonisation, this attitude in the bureaucracy has not changed,’ and ‘leaders and especially MPs use and abuse religion in Parliament to smooth things over.’
Articulation between values and systems

Eight respondents brought up clashes or lack of articulation between ‘western’ and Samoan values and institutions, including problems within the political system itself, as reasons for breakdowns in governance. However, they gave different interpretations of the problem. One respondent stated that ‘much of the constitution is based on western social values while Samoans live in their own cultural set-up—people live in a time capsule where they are not connected to the massive national experiment in democracy, even though they know how to speak up in the village situation.’ Another lamented that ‘the political system has become more complicated because of the proliferation of matai titles, which means that they are not well recognised in the village now. In the past only the high matai went to Parliament, now small matai with money get elected.’ A third thought that ‘there have been breakdowns with regard to cultural practices and values and that the traditional safety net is not as strong as it used to be.’ A fourth stated that governance breaks down when ‘decisions are made on a family/kinship basis rather than for the village or the nation. Within the fono the matai should work for the village, within the family they should work for the family; there is a separation of responsibilities and functions.’ A fifth thought that Samoa suffered from a ‘lack of separation of powers.’

Government abuse

Eight respondents mentioned governmental abuse of one form or another as a cause of breakdowns in governance. They made the following statements: ‘the Government is able to dominate Samoa because 2AP and the television cover all of Samoa whereas other coverage is very limited geographically,’ ‘threats are made against public servants who want to protest, auditing of public accounts is behind by eight years, the government only informs the public occasionally instead of all the time,’ ‘there is a barrier to good governance when the government can change the rules to suit itself,’ ‘the government tends to dominate; this happens with the Speaker of Parliament pushing for the government and not allowing the opposition to express itself.’

The Church

The role of religion and the church as causes of breakdowns in governance were mentioned by four respondents and comments included: ‘People are unable to express their views to the faife’au because he is seen as
being sacred and their only link to God. This leads to bad governance, to competition with respect to donations which leads people to blame each other and disrupts community affairs; ‘the church and religion stifle debate in the village,’ and ‘there is an interference of religious groups and churches within politics.’

**Political parties**

Four respondents blamed political parties for ‘affecting the civil service,’ being ‘groups with vested interests,’ ‘not wanting to be clean’ and for ‘creating a lack of understanding within governance.’

**The people**

Three respondents blamed ‘the people’ (of Samoa) for ‘being complacent,’ ‘allowing themselves to be bought and ignoring corruption and being satisfied to accept things as they come’ and not having ‘as high a degree of concern and enlightenment as in other democratic countries.’

**An interpretation: causes of breakdowns in governance**

Our respondents clearly felt that contemporary leadership is the main factor leading to breakdowns in governance. However, they were critical not so much of the performance of leaders as of their lack of consideration for the public at large. Systemic problems were also brought up (by eight people) but seemed to be outweighed by the dissatisfaction with leadership proper. None of the respondents attributed their dissatisfaction to personal treatment or problems which they had encountered themselves directly. They spoke in general and abstract terms, and when they gave examples, the latter generally focused on issues which were discussed relatively publicly in Samoa.

**Remedies to breakdowns in governance**

Respondents gave a wide variety of answers when asked to suggest remedies to breakdowns in governance. Institutional remedies of one form or another were suggested nine times, greater consultation and communication was mentioned seven times, increasing awareness of the people was mentioned five times, the improvement of socioeconomic conditions, six times, education, five times and leadership, four times.
Institutional remedies

The following institutional solutions were put forward by nine respondents: ‘a proper legal framework for Samoa already exists but it needs to be better applied;’ ‘Samoa needs a proper system of checks and balances;’ ‘the constitution needs to be respected;’ ‘the public service needs to be decentralised;’ ‘government should look at reforming the constitution to include the representation of youth’ and ‘the 21 year limit on voting should be reconsidered;’ ‘there should be a greater separation of powers;’ ‘the court system needs to be improved so that cases are dealt with faster;’ ‘the Controller and Chief Auditor and Attorney General’s offices need to be strengthened;’ ‘legislation instituting a Code of Ethics should be introduced gradually;’ ‘the public service should be depoliticised;’ and ‘public servants should be appointed according to expertise and ability.’

Communication

Seven respondents mentioned communication, consultation and participation of various forms. They gave the following interpretations
- ‘talking within families’
- ‘people working together and communicating’
- ‘the voice of the general public must be considered from time to time’
- ‘more talanoaga/stonotaga’
- ‘greater participation for the maximisation of productivity’
- ‘deliberation, meeting to resolve issues, consultation and reconsidering decisions’, and
- ‘having a consultative approach’.

Socioeconomic conditions

Six respondents felt that economic and social conditions needed to be improved. They stated
- ‘the cost of living needs to be reduced’
- ‘as people get richer things will improve and with an increase in the middle class there’ll be less corruption’
- ‘the government needs to focus on the really needy people’
- ‘access to roads and water supply [in rural areas] need to be improved so that the people will go on the land and use it and decongest the villages’
• 'professionals like doctors and teachers need to get better wages'
• 'social services need to be looked at now that infrastructure is up to a stage where Samoans can develop'
• 'there needs to be a better distribution of wealth to [ensure] a more financially secure population which will be less susceptible to bribery', and
• 'growth is not being distributed fairly and is being accumulated by the top 5 per cent of society'.

Awareness

Greater awareness was thought to be a remedy by five respondents who stated
• 'we must identify aspects of Samoan and Western culture which can be understood by people and blended'
• 'people need to be made to better understand contemporary issues such as why there are marches to uphold constitutional values' and 'those who value the democratic system must help the maturing process'
• 'the awareness of the general public about what is happening now and what will come in the future must be increased (there is little publicity about what is going on in the rural areas')
• 'we must increase people's understanding and awareness about the modern day issues affecting them' and 'we need to educate people about issues such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child which does not intend to go against the culture'
• 'people must have a clear understanding of the different levels of governance in Samoa (which are clearly distinguished) and understand the responsibilities which come with each level,' and
• 'people need to understand that the government belongs to them'.

Political change

Five respondents also stated that political change was the answer to remedying breakdowns in governance
‘the government must be voted out’
• ‘vote out the government but most people won’t,’
• ‘beyond the year 2000 there will be a change of government at the village made by the chiefs and Samoans themselves which will change the form of decision making in the country’
• ‘someone, perhaps a charismatic leader must knock walls down’
• ‘limitations must be broken down’.

**Education**

One respondent suggested ‘every Samoan should be educated up to the tertiary level,’ while another thought education (‘not necessarily formal but self-education’) was a key to remedying breakdowns in governance. A third respondent stated that ‘compulsory education should be fully implemented.’ Two others thought education was essential to better governance.

**Leadership**

Leadership was mentioned four times as a remedy to breakdowns in governance: ‘having the right leaders and getting the right people in the job;’ ‘the pressure for remedying breakdowns in governance must come from the politicians and candidates themselves in their platform;’ ‘village leaders must understand and know the villagers and set appropriate tasks accordingly;’ ‘people in authority in the village must put the village’s first and make sure these interests are met’ and ‘the matai [should remember] he is just there to express the desires and position of his family at the fono but not more than that.’

**Women**

Greater involvement of women was mentioned by three respondents.

- ‘having more women in decision making areas for instance in Parliament (there has been an improvement in departments and statutory bodies but there is still a disparity)’
- ‘the department of women needs to get the latter to express themselves more’
- ‘the Ministry of Women’s Affairs must be more active and improve relations with other groups’.
Other responses

Two respondents stated that social customs needed amending to improve governance: ‘expenditure on customary obligations, particularly on *ie toga* should be reduced;’ ‘people need to face life realistically and not put such high demands on relatives: families here are in competition with each other and ruin their relatives overseas—and those overseas need to send things that are relevant.’ Two respondents thought that ‘maintaining unity;’ ‘creating understanding’ and ‘acting with one voice’ were appropriate remedies.

Two people thought that the role of the media needed to be enhanced by government. They were in favour of ‘the revival of weekly press conferences’ and thought ‘the government should increase access to the media gradually as it has been doing.’

One respondent mentioned legislative and economic reform such as ‘performance budgets’ being instituted by the government as a step towards good governance.

An interpretation: remedies to breakdown in governance

The respondents put forth a variety of suggestions to remedy breakdowns in governance, indicating their sentiment that there is no single solution. The overall emphasis was on refining rather than replacing existing structures and creating opportunities for a more workable relationship between government and the people.

What governance for Samoa?

Overall our interviewees were not fundamentally dissatisfied with Samoa’s political system. While eight respondents did suggest clashes between the *fa’amatai* and introduced constitutional institutions, which led to breakdowns in governance, the overwhelming majority blamed poor leadership not systemic problems. However, it may be that they are reluctant to tackle what is a complicated issue.

The urban respondents were more concerned with issues of accountability, human rights and consultation and communication. They viewed bad governance in Samoa as characterised by a government overstepping institutional boundaries and not being sufficiently responsive to the public. Although some of the rural respondents mentioned wider consultation as being important, they were more concerned with peacekeeping, order and not having ‘the boat rocked.’
The varied answers seem to demonstrate the political plurality of contemporary Samoan society. Access to political 'goods' (information, services, proximity to leaders) in Samoa is differentiated according to where and how people live, their background, resources, level of formal education, extent and links with people overseas. Groups such as Samoa Mo Taeao, Samoa 2000 and the Western Samoa Society of Civil Liberties want more open and critical debate in Samoan society and an expansion of civil liberties. Other segments of society expect the government to perform according to 'the basic principle of Polynesian governance which is prosperity or *manu*' (the government is acceptable so long as it provides and fulfills its promises). Finally, some people emphasise relationships (kinship) while others are more concerned with issues.

To more adequately allow expressions of plurality, perhaps Samoa needs to move on from a 'unitary' (Barber, 1984:148) or 'monistic' type of democracy to a more 'deliberative' democracy that is more tolerant of difference and provides more scope for informed dialogue and action. This does not mean Samoa should fall into the trap of minimal majoritarian, liberal representative democracy and abandon the features which enrich its society, but rather that it needs to move away from a heavy reliance on the ideology of consensus, unity and commonality. This shift would allow Samoans to better monitor the government and influence the management of public affairs.

The emphasis on unity and collectivist ideals means that dissent, an important function of which is to stimulate or renew debate, is discouraged. According to a Samoan academic, the dominant discourse, whether in Parliament or in other institutions such as the *fono* and church, focuses around 'unity,' which in the present Samoan context, means agreeing with the authorities, as that is 'the only way of achieving one voice.' The deliberative function of Parliament itself was questioned (or dismissed) in the Commission of Inquiry's report on the Controller and Chief Auditor's Report to the Legislative Assembly (October 1994). The report stated '...given the realities of the system and the existence of party discipline, the House, in fact, is not a deliberative body. It does not decide policy or the content of legislation by exchange of views' (Commission of Inquiry 1994:10). The authors added 'the ultra-democratic idea that Parliament is, so to speak, an assembly of the nation in miniature, and that it is consequently the will of the nation, not the will of Parliament as such, that makes parliamentary decisions legitimate, is not as true in our case as it may be elsewhere under different systems' (ibid:10) (see Chapter 2 this volume).
Public participation in the proceedings of governance has been stifled by the lack of space for dissent and deliberation on the actions of government. It has led to a situation, where according to a long-standing head of a government department, ‘the people are so used to being governed that at meetings when the department tries to get their advice and ideas, they respond ‘you know what’s best for us.’ It has also led to a political system which relies heavily on ‘clientelism,’ both to obtain support at election time and to secure party loyalty, as pointed out by Asofou So’o (1996:221).

The distribution of public resources (for example, during ceremonial occasions) which in the past was transparent, in accordance with the Samoan custom of acknowledging gifts, now tends to be viewed with suspicion. The management of public funds needs to be just that: public. In addition, the role of government must be to help people deal with change, by making them more self-sufficient not just economically but politically—so that people get a greater understanding and awareness of the issues affecting them. At present the opposite tends to happen. Criticism leveled at MPs and chiefs for not being more responsive to people in rural areas, is impeded by a simultaneous reliance on them as the only or main source of ‘action’ in meeting the needs of the people.

So’o (1996) notes that politics in Samoa have evolved substantially since independence, both in terms of fa’amatatia and within the parliamentary context. Over the past thirty or so years the Samoan political landscape has become more complex and varied (So’o 1996). Samoa has seen the development of party politics alongside kin-based political alliances, the establishment of a form of universal suffrage and the development of private media. Values and ideas have evolved but they are accompanied by some confusion about peoples’ rights and duties in the liberal democratic context and in the matai system. Stemming this confusion requires openness, a more appropriate circulation of information and a debate to re-negotiate contemporary norms. The responses we have mentioned and the obvious diversity in assessing notions of governance further support this. We are not saying that Samoa needs to aspire to a pre-determined ideology or framework, rather that the political plurality of Samoa must be given the opportunity to breathe. We also believe the government has a role to play in this development along the lines of Anthony Giddens’ statement that
Government exists to
• provide means for the representation of diverse interests...
• create and protect an open public sphere, in which unconstrained debate about policy issues can be carried on… (Giddens 1998:47).

In Samoa, the government has recently emphasised the institutional and economic aspects of ‘good governance’ as illustrated by its New Zealand inspired public reform33 and by its promotion of private sector development, detailed in two documents issued by the Ministry of Finance (Samoa 1996, 1998).34 The focus has been on improving the efficiency of the public service and on enhancing the economic climate to attract public and private foreign investment. The financial and trade reforms and public ‘right-sizing’ carried out by Samoa puts it in good stead with donors35 whose main concern in promoting the governance agenda has been to guarantee an efficient use of their aid funds. However, as it stands, the governance agenda in Samoa does little to address the concerns raised by our respondents, which were essentially political in nature.

This is a flaw in the governance agenda itself, which seeks to correct mismanagement of funds through technical or mechanistic reforms, rather than addressing better political representation.36 Donors, whether multilateral or bilateral, are either unable or unwilling to outrightly address political problems in recipient countries, but are nonetheless using the good governance agenda to promote a formula of less state, more civil society and more private sector in the hope that it will be conducive to economic growth.37

The good governance agenda as it exists does little to enhance democracy, even though governance, as the word’s etymology suggests, is really about politics. Although the good governance agenda does try to deal with issues such as accountability and transparency, it does so with the assumption that liberal democracies operating in the developed countries are examples to be followed. It does not seek to question how democracy could be improved in developed countries as well as in developing countries and how political participation could be enhanced worldwide. Its preoccupations are practical and financially driven. It is also an imposition from the outside and not a call for dialogue. This approach may suit Pacific Islands governments but is it of any use to the people?
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Notes

1 For a critique of the governance agenda’s understanding of ‘civil society’ in the Pacific context, see chapters 4, 5 and 6. See also Helu 1997 and Huffer and Molisa 1999.

2 Falealupo is at the western tip on the island of Savaii, and is considered to be the furthest district on Savaii, from the capital Apia. In mentioning Falealupo the intent is to show that the articulation of governance or the concept of governance as promoted in Apia, should not easily be assumed on the same standing in Falealupo or anywhere else in Samoa. Liu argues that ‘because of the fragmenting of the politico-cultural economy of Samoa, many “issues” which assume centrality in Apia urban area discourses become increasingly less salient with increasing distance from the urban area. Although the speed of the spread of discourse can vary, many people nonetheless have opinions on many of the issues once they are exposed to them, although the degree to which they believe that such issues actually affect their lives varies, depending not only on the issue but what people may have heard from matai, other relatives, faife’au (pastor), and other sources’ (see Liu 1991:159).

3 Though as illustrated by the above statement by the Prime Minister of Samoa, this is not usually the feature most promoted by governments.

4 One of the reasons given for this is Tupua Tamasese’s inability to fully recover from the legacy of the Public Service Association strike in 1981. Tupua Tamasese who was Prime Minister at the time (and then known as Tupuola Efi) has since been unable to lead his party to win an election.

5 The government, for instance, amended the constitution in 1997 restricting what used to be a life-long term of the Controller and Chief Auditor (CCA) to a three year contract, thereby ridding itself of its dispute with former CCA, Sua Rimoni Ah Chong. The government has also extended the terms of members of Parliament from three to five years.

6 For instance, in July 1998, during a debate on the erection of a ‘Fale Tatalo’ or ‘Prayer House’ funded by the Government, the leader of Opposition was accused by the Deputy Prime Minister of being homosexual, an adulterer, of having committed incest and having
threatened to physically attack the Speaker of Parliament (see *Tala Nei News* 14 July 1998).

7 This Ministry, however, stands near the bottom of the hierarchy among ministerial portfolios. This is attested to by reference made to Leafa Vitale’s ‘demotion’ from the Ministry of Public Works to that of Women’s Affairs ‘which [is] generally regarded as [a] portfolio for new ministers to cut their teeth’ (see *Tala Nei News* 12 April 1999 and *Samoa News* 6 August 1999).

8 The *Tumua ma Pule*, a group of traditional orators, began organising protest marches against the Samoan government when it introduced the VAGST in 1997. For a detailed account of the origin and current role of the *Tumua ma Pule ma Aiga*, see So’o forthcoming.

9 Several government practices point ‘to a significantly strong centralised control on the state apparatus, examples include: contracting heads of government departments through an act of parliament, almost no non-government activities to be aired on national television and radio, and continual abuse through an overwhelming majority in Parliament’ (see Tamasese 1998).

10 Samoan ambivalence also reflect to some extent the fact that some people or groups of people have benefited from their links with those in power while others have not. This indicates a lack of political openness in Samoa which leads to people being perceived in manichaean terms as being either with the government or against it.

11 The purpose of documenting the interviews as we have done is to show the respondent’s answers as they stated them. We have deliberately chosen to interpret them briefly only after presenting them in their original form to the reader.

12 Seven of the respondents were women. In two instances, both in rural settings, two or more people answered the questions together and were counted as a single respondent.

13 Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi replaced Tofilau Eti Alesana as Prime Minister of Samoa in November 1998. At the time of our interview Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi was Minister of Finance as well as Deputy Prime Minister.

14 The term ‘covenant’ was mistaken for governance. Interestingly enough, responses made from an interpretation of covenant were similar to those made about governance.

15 We had difficulty finding a Samoan term consistent with governance. Initially the term *pule’aga* was used which loosely translated means authority, power or government. The term *pulega* was then used interchangeably with the term *pule’aga* (area or sphere of authority) which may have had an impact on the responses, given the context of the interview.

16 Civil society has been defined as ‘a social construct of the developing capitalist era whose main purpose is to counter-balance
the state and, whilst not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent the state from dominating and atomising the rest of society’ (Gellner 1995:32). As defined by Ernest Gellner civil society precludes kin-based groups: ‘traditional man can sometimes escape the tyranny of kings, but only at the cost of falling under the tyranny of cousins. The kin-defined, ritually orchestrated, demanding and life-pervading systems of the “ancient city”... do indeed succeed in avoiding tyrannical centralisation, but only at the cost of a demanding culture which modern man would find intolerable’ (Gellner, 1995: 33). For a detailed discussion of ‘civil society’ see John A. Hall (ed.) 1995 and Jürgen Habermas 1997.

17 For instance, the UNDP states that ‘governance includes the state, but transcends it by taking in the private sector and civil society.’ See Speth 1997 (p.1).

18 The term Malo can also be referred to mean the state or the nation. For example, government departments are often referred to as ofisa o le malo, similarly Le Malo Tutoatasi o Samoa, loosely translated means independent Samoa.

19 In 1998 the Samoa Umbrella Group for NGOs (SUNGO) was established with the aim of bringing together the non-governmental organisations of Samoa. See Fairbairn Dunlop, Chapter 6 in this volume.

20 In addition, as documented by Asofou So’o (1996) Samoa has a high number of Ministers per inhabitant compared, for instance to New Zealand (respectively 17,777 and 165,570 in 1988).

21 As Habermas writes: ‘[Liberalism’s] vision of a politically well ordered market-society is focussed on the complementary relation between public and private spheres...The legal powers of property and contract are to allow every private citizen an effective pursuit of his own conception of the good...For their private decisions citizens are not accountable in public’ (Habermas 1997:7).

22 Although three respondents did not specifically mention the word consultation, the authors felt that their statements could be interpreted as ‘consultation’. The statements made were ‘the village understanding the decisions of the matai,’ ‘leaders should always be asking for advice and opinions of others,’ and ‘a village and church that meet often.’

23 This Samoan verse refers to the clear division between the different structures which make up the social, political and economic organisation of Samoa and implies their perpetuity. Each of these structures, for instance the nu’u (village) and the many divisions within it, the itumalo (district) and atunu’u (nation) have clear and specific functions within the fa’amatai. Aiono Fanafi Le Tagaloa (1992:117) provides an explanation of Samoan social organisation
using a socio-metric wheel ‘with the matai group as its hub, or as circles that exist side by side and operate and inter-relate in concentric connections of blood ties and marital reciprocity.’

24 Social, political and economic order in Samoa hinges on its social structures being fixed and on those within these structures understanding and observing their expected place. In general in the rural context peace is maintained by observing one’s place in society and acknowledging the status of others. The village fono works through the other village institutions (untitled men and women’s groups and extended family units) to reinforce and maintain peace by ensuring that these groups implement the various decisions that promote peace and compliance with fa’aSamoa as interpreted by the fono.

25 Political pluralism implies that citizens have different expectations and attitudes towards their political system. As a concept it allows for both group and individual differences and rejects ‘exclusive dogmas’ or ‘one right view about things’. See Gregor McLennan 1995:98–9.

26 Dr Unasa Felise Leulu Va’a, personal communication.

27 Asofou So’o argues that the development of political parties in Samoa has already led to a decline of ‘the traditional notion of unity, reminiscent of old notions of monistic democracy’ (So’o 1996:203).

28 One in which there is a public space in which citizens can actively, freely and equally deliberate (see Bohman 1996).

29 Some Samoans, however, maintain that the conventions of debate that lead to consensus in Samoan processes of deliberation best suit reaching an amicable solution and are thus appropriate in the contemporary context.


31 Politics at the national level has a tendency to emphasise discourse rather than dialogue. James Bohman summarises the difference between the two: ‘Discourses employ specific regulative standards of justification, and they are typically structured towards one sort of claim or another…. By contrast, dialogue is the mere give and take of reasons. It does not necessarily aim to produce well-justified claims; rather, it aims to produce claims that are wide enough in scope and sufficiently justified to be accountable to an indefinite public of fellow citizens.’ According to Bohman, ‘The joint activity through which [public] deliberation takes place within the public sphere is dialogical and not merely discursive’ (1996:57).

32 Although at times this is more a reflection of respect for status than an acknowledgment of ability and knowledge.

33 For a description of New Zealand’s public reform effort, see Hood 1998.
Recent Samoan economic reforms are outlined in two articles recently published in the Pacific Economic Bulletin (1999 Vol 14(1)). Tala Nei News (3 June 1999) commented on the articles noting that 'the Economic Bulletin says that Samoa is now the darling of the international agencies and must beware of a rush of aid.'

For instance of the latter document states that the 'vision' of Samoa is: '... to lead the region in structural and public sector reform, good governance and increasing per capita incomes, growth in employment and improved health and education standards while incorporating social and cultural values and environmental sustainability.' See Samoa 1998.

This is the case of the World Bank which does not have a political mandate and therefore cannot address political issues directly. Other donors feel that they cannot deal with this issue for fear of being accused of interference in internal affairs.

As Jacob Nena, President of the Federated States of Micronesia and host of the 1998 South Pacific Forum reminds us, past economic policy dictated by donors has not always led to growth: 'Implied in the need for reform is the realisation that some unfortunate mistakes have been made and some opportunities have been lost—at least temporarily. For those of us who have been involved in policymaking dating back to the 1970s and 80s...we must acknowledge...that some of our basic assumptions and hence many of our policy decisions were flawed...Frequently we relied upon the recommendations of the same donor partners and institutions that are now supporting us in our reform efforts. The truth is that there have been lots of lessons learned by all parties.' See Welcome Remarks and Thematic Presentation by H.E. Jacob Nena <http://www.forumsec.org.gj/news/1998/aug06.htm>.
The good governance program, which first received public notoriety in 1989 (World Bank 1989a) is likely to have important bearing in Samoa and in particular on its traditional system of governance, fa’aSāmoa. It is comprised of many initiatives, and here, the predominant concern is limited to those regarding civil society. More specifically, it is limited to those concerning civil society institutions based on ‘affective ties.’ Affective ties may be defined as ties between people based on notions of kin, culture, ethnicity and others of a similar nature.

The fa’aSāmoa is a very complex system that has social and political elements.¹ For the purposes of this chapter it is seen as a system whose foundations are strongly rooted upon affective ties. Admittedly, there is much more to the system than the manner in which it is handled in this inquiry. Nevertheless I will focus on its affective ties characteristics and on how these are manifested in a civil society institution called the fa’amatai.

There is a strong parallel between the fa’aSāmoa and the institutions based on affective ties as defined by the good governance agenda for civil society and in the writings of two prominent liberals, Ernest Gellner and John Hall. In their work, they claim that affective ties are organised and maintained through various sanctions, rites and rituals encapsulated in the term, ‘social cage’.² This chapter will demonstrate the presence of a social cage in the fa’aSāmoa and its role in maintaining important precepts of the system. In light of this it will examine the good governance agenda for civil society’s likely bearing on Samoa.
Good governance

The 1989 World Bank Long Term Perspective Study (LTPS), *Sub-Saharan Africa: from crisis to sustainable development* was the report which first brought the development paradigm known as ‘good governance’ to public attention (Lancaster 1993:9). It defined governance as ‘the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development’ (World Bank 1992:3). It associated poor governance with problems such as ‘lack of accountability, transparency and predictability on the part of politicians and bureaucrats and the absence of the rule of law...[terms which it often used as proxies for a less polite term—corruption...]’ (Lancaster 1993:9). By contrast, it constructed good governance in opposition to this, associating it with initiatives to ensure accountability, legitimacy, transparency and respect for the rule of law and human rights. Specifically, it argued that good governance had several prerequisites: an efficient public service; an independent judicial system and legal framework to enforce contracts; the accountable administration of public funds and an independent public auditor responsible to a representative legislature; respect for the law and human rights at all levels of government; a pluralistic institutional structure; and a free press (Leftwhich 1993:610). Essentially, the good governance program brings a holistic approach to development efforts. It engages social, economic and political concerns to produce various agenda, which are posited as avenues for achieving better governance structures, facilitative of economic growth.

The good governance program is directly related to the failures of the development paradigm, structural adjustment reform, in engendering economic growth in Africa. This paradigm addressed development problems primarily with economic tools. It comprised a ‘broad range of “macro” and “sectoral” reforms’ which essentially seek to manipulate price and demand in order to stabilise the economy and engender long-term economic growth (Weissman 1990:1,623). It was based on the premise that ‘if sufficient economic incentives are provided to producers, they will expand existing production and invest in new productive activities’ (Lancaster 1993:9). This, it was hoped, would create an ‘engine for sustained economic growth.’ However, after nearly a decade of these reforms, the envisaged engine did not materialise (Lancaster 1993:9). The problems have been attributed to the absence of a facilitative framework for the economic initiatives contained in the adjustment reforms. The absence of such factors in Africa has been labelled poor governance by the World Bank’s LTPS.
A host of development agencies and aid donors are promoting good governance. Among the most prominent development agencies are the Bretton Woods institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Arditto-Barletta 1994:197–8). Although their agenda are not exactly the same they share a high degree of commonalty in the initiatives they advocate: each emphasises accountability, legitimacy, transparency and respect for the rule of law and human rights. The same emphasis is found in the policies of major aid donors such as the United States, France and Britain (Lancaster 1993:9). Within the South Pacific, international and regional organisations such as the Asian Development Bank (Asian Development Bank 1998) and the South Pacific Forum (Hussein 1997:41–3), and the governments of New Zealand (New Zealand Government 1996, 1997) and Australia (Larmour 1998c:3) are strong supporters of good governance.

Although this is only an elementary explanation of what is arguably a complex development paradigm, it points out three issues that are necessary to keep in mind in the course of this chapter. First, the significance of the African experience in the formulation of the good governance discourse, in both providing the impetus for it and later contributing to the affirmation of its main tenets suggests that the program may have some biases to the particular characteristics of that experience. Second, the list of advocates for the program strongly suggests that the program is likely to affect development and developing countries. Third, the advocates of good governance do not promote good governance in perfect harmony with each other. Therefore, what is posited in this chapter as the good governance agenda for civil society may not accord with all views. Here, the good governance agenda for civil society is drawn significantly from the experience of the World Bank, arguably the most prominent advocate of the program. Finally, the good governance agenda for civil society is just one of many associated with the good governance discourse.

A complementary liberal view

Gellner and Hall argue that institutions that inhibit individual autonomy and freedom should not be classified as civil society. Gellner defines civil society as, ‘that set of diverse non-governmental institutions, which is strong enough to counterbalance the state, and, whilst not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent the state dominating
and atomising the rest of society’ (Gellner 1995:32). However, he argues that not all institutions which satisfy these requirements may be called civil society institutions: such a definition is susceptible to accommodating ‘many forms of social order which in fact would not satisfy us, or those who have in recent years felt inspired by this slogan’ (Gellner 1995:32).

Turning his discussion to traditional agrarian times, Gellner argues that despite the dominance of highly centralised despotic systems, partly or highly structured communities did exist autonomously. Although these met the general criterion of separation from the state, they are not to be granted civil society status on the grounds that they maintained cohesion and solidarity through ‘a heavy ritual underscoring of social roles and obligations’ (Gellner 1995:33). They fail because they were ‘generally conceived and defined in kin terms...their visibility and authority strengthened by a plethora of ritual reminders...discipline is enforced by a proliferation of minor punishable transgressions, the avoidance of which puts a burden on each individual and keeps him in awe of the social order as a whole’ (ibid). According to Gellner, civil society is not to include these ‘segmentary communities, cousin-ridden and ritual ridden’ that although may have been free of central tyranny, were not free of a ‘demanding culture which modern man would find intolerably stifling’ (ibid). Hall (1995:15) builds on this by terming the constraints Gellner refers to as ‘social cages’. These refer to rituals, rites and obligations perpetuated through kinship ties and serving to subdue the individual to the social order (Gellner 1995:32–3). Along with Gellner, Hall argues that classical agrarian civilizations should not be included in the term civil society, despite their ability to evade and avoid state penetration.

Arguably, social cages are the mechanisms by which affective ties are constructed and maintained. Essentially, affective ties are bonds between people, predicated on informal and affective foundations such as kin, ethnicity, community and so forth. Social cages, on the other hand, construct and maintain affective ties by informing people of the characteristics and importance of the affective ties that exist between them. They impress upon people certain forms of behaviour and values and act to maintain these throughout their lives. Hall argues that social cages keep the individual in awe of a particular social order. Arguably, this ‘particular social order’ is the equivalent of affective ties.
The fa'aSāmoa

The fa'aSāmoa is essentially a traditional governance system, serving social, economic and political functions. Meleisea refers to it as the modern Samoan political system (Meleisea 1988b:70). Lawson states that it is a 'socio-political organisation' (Lawson 1996:119). To understand the fa'aSāmoa, one must understand the essential features of Samoan society such as the 'āiga, the nu'u, the matai and the fono. The term 'āiga refers to the nuclear and extended family. It may include all members of a large clan comprising all descendants of a common ancestor, either male or female (Meleisea 1988a:13). Moreover, it may even be taken to include, 'descent groups which identify themselves in relation to an extremely important ancestor or ancestress...' (Meleisea 1988a:13). The nu'u is comprised of groups of 'āiga. Village would be an adequate concept to translate this. A more complex understanding of it, however, is that it is 'a group of extended families with a shared history which is summarised in the fa'alupega which gives the village its identity' (Meleisea 1987b:28). The matai is the head of the family: the decision maker for its members. The fono a le nu'u is the village council where the matai sit and make decisions concerning affairs of the village (Aiono 1992:120). According to Meleisea, the fa'aSāmoa is a framework for action based upon the social structure of 'āiga, matai, fono, nu'u, and other elements (Meleisea 1988a:23).

Arguably the fa'aSāmoa is a system that is based on affective ties. Manifesting itself in an institution known as the fa'amatai, the fa'aSāmoa encapsulates all aspects of life; social, economic and political (Aiono 1992:120). Within this organisation the groups are divided between the matai, faletua ma tauasi (wives of matai), 'aumaga (group of untitled men, individually known as taule'ale'a), tama'ita'i (young women) and tamaiti (children). The relationship between these groups and the individual entities that comprise them revolve around the ties of kin and culture that exist between them.

The matai, 'aumaga (or taule'ale'a) and faletua ma tauasi may be used to illustrate the centrality of affective ties within the fa'aSāmoa. Each member within this organisation is delegated a position and a role according to the group into which they fall. The matai governs the affairs of the family: he or she, 'controls all the affairs of the family, who look to him for guidance and assistance in their time of need' (Grattan 1985:17). The matai is 'the owner of the 'āiga land' as well as the carrier of its verbal
traditions and heritage, especially pertaining to their particular titles (Aiono 1992:120). For a taule'ale'a to be granted a matai title he must serve the family. Even women who ascribe to be matai must serve the family. This is evident in the popular Samoan proverb, O le ala i le pule o le tautua, which means, the path to power is through service. Through building a strong relationship with the family through service, a person will secure support for his or her bid for a particular title. Without a strong relationship between a person and his family, it is difficult though not impossible, to achieve matai status. According to Fiauauai and Tuimaleali’ifano (1997:8), “The emphasis placed on service to one’s matai and āiga potopoto (extended family) by Samoans is one of the noted cultural elements to be taken into consideration when one’s family begins deliberation concerning titles and prospective title holders.”

The fa’amatai social organisation may also be demarcated into five fale (houses): fale a le ali’i ma faipule (house of the matai), fale a le faletua ma tausi (house of the wives of matai), fale a le sa’aoa and tamaiti (house of unmarried women), fale a le taule’ale’a (house of untitled men), fale a le autalavou (house of the youth, including young children). The faletua ma tausi provide a significant amount of support for the matai while at the same time undertaking most of the work in raising the family. The name faletua ma tausi reflects this role. Faletua literally means the house at the back, referring to the back of the fale of ali’i ma faipule. The house acts as a support for the house of the matai. Tausi literally means to nurture, and again, this refers to the supportive role that the wives of the matai provide for their husbands.

The ‘aumaga are the strength of the family or the village and are expected to undertake all heavy manual labour. While service will reward individual taule’ale’a with a matai title, some titles are reserved only for those with a particular genealogy. Although such a genealogical link does not guarantee the bestowal of a title, it does offer some an opportunity not afforded others. Fiauauai and Tuimaleali’ifano (1997:8) state

Achieved skills are culturally recognised and honored; however, Samoans stress and put greater value on genealogical faia connections to former holders of matai...heirs to the title through direct lines of descent, also have a significant and important connection to titles. These individuals certainly are the most likely successors if they have the necessary skills and have rendered service to the descent group.

The fa’aSamoa through the fa’amatai acts as a framework for action in which affective ties are central. Socially, as described above, it defines
The relationships between people. Economically, the fa'amatai encourages community oriented economic action. The fruits of labour are predominantly consumed on a community rather than individual basis. Similarly, goods obtained via other avenues, such as presents from special occasions, are collected and dispersed on a communal basis. Goods accumulated are given to the matai who then allocates them to family members. Politically, the fa'amatai by way of the fa'alupega, ranks important titles within the family, village, district and country. Matai ranks accord certain privileges and status. Those higher up the chain of command are accorded greater respect and will most likely command support for their initiatives in governing family, village, district and even nation.

One focus of fa'a Samoa is the provision of welfare for members of Samoan society. A contemporary form of welfare commitment is found in the system of 'remittances' which, are part of the larger system of kinship obligations (Fitzgerald and Howard 1990:43). Macpherson defines remittances as 'The reciprocal enactment and fulfilment and obligations to those related through blood, marriage and adoption as a function of both duty and love' (1994:83). Samoans abroad usually provide significant financial support for relatives back home. According to figures provided by Alburg (1991:18) the level of remittances in real Samoan Tala terms nearly doubled between 1980 and 1989. The 1989 real figures placed the total of remittances at ST$33.5 million. According to Thomas (1985:221), 'remittances now provide the largest single source of income for many Samoan families.' Macpherson states 'Migrant commitments to their communities of origin may rest on complex emotional and social foundations' (1994:83). These emotional and social foundations are arguably centred on affective ties. Rolff (1978:22–3) notes that through kin ties, people are able to elicit assistance, however; 'This does not mean that Samoans refuse to help known relatives who failed to validate their kin groups membership, but in such cases there is little obligation to give aid, aside from generally high standards of generosity.'

The affective ties inherent in the fa'a Samoa are maintained by a social cage comprised of various sanctions, rites, and rituals. This keeps the individual in awe of and subservient to important elements of the fa'a Samoa. The norms that people are expected to abide by are stringently enforced in informal and subjective avenues comparable to a social cage. The latter may be illustrated in the context of welfare provision. The fa'a Samoa strongly enforces the importance of maintaining affective ties,
and one of the purposes for this is to ensure that there is a network of support for people.

An important sanction that maintains the discipline of the group is physical punishment. Admittedly, physical punishment is not exclusive to the fa'asāmoa or to the Samoan people. It is a behavioural control tool in all societies. What is particular to Samoans is not the rite but the values that this rite seeks to foster. One of these is fa'aaloalo or respect. Fa'aaloalo is an integral part of the system that aids in the promotion of order. Individuals are expected to give the utmost respect to their peers and most importantly their superiors. According to Mageo (1991:18) 'fa'aaloalo specifically connotes listening to the dictates of elders and, in response, rendering them humble service.' With respect to children, fa'aaloalo enforces at an early age the importance of listening to and obeying elders. The lessons learnt at this stage of their lives prepare children for a future where they are constantly directed by elders: 'the result of Samoan punishment is an inhibiting feeling that encourages children to assume both the physical and the psychological elements of that submissive bearing earlier exacted by force' (ibid.).

At the matai level, the fono assumes the position of superiority to which the matai must be subservient. Here, punishments are more comprehensive. A matai who does not accept or comply with a decision of the fono may be prevailed upon to retract or suffer a fine. If the matai does not pay the fine, he will be publicly condemned within the fono setting. If this fails to extract the desired behaviour or action, then the offender may be banished from the village (Grattan 1985:17–18). The punishment may even, though rarely, result in death. An example of this was the killing of Nu'utai Mafulu in Lona village in late September 1993. Mafulu was executed because he refused to abide by certain regulations and protocols of his village. His crimes were that he refused to contribute to village affairs, resisted council decision, and played cricket for, and transported players of, another village (Pacific Islands Monthly 4 November 1993). This case highlights the extent to which punishment will be carried out in order to promote and maintain certain social roles and expectations.

Another aspect of fa'asāmoa and fa'amatai that serves to promote control is the lauga. This may have different meanings depending on the contexts in which it is carried out. In the fono, it may constitute a traditional oratorical performance. In church, it equates to a sermon. Within the fono, the lauga celebrates amongst other things, 'eternal values,
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and immutable hierarchies' (Duranti 1995:160). One of the recurrent lines of some lāuga is e le'i liua, or it 'has not changed' (ibid). Thus Duranti suggests that: ‘The world represented is a place of harmony, where social hierarchies are immutable.’ Furthermore, ‘the Samoan speechmakers present to their audience a model of the universe in which the traditional social order, with its hierarchies and values, is given historical and philosophical justification’ (Duranti 1995:161).

One way that control is promoted through this forum is by clarifying the order and ranking of matai titles and villages. A set of ceremonial greetings known as the fa'alupega are used for this task. The fa'alupega is a kind of un-written constitution against which village people check unconventional practices by some of their members and outsiders. The existence of a fa'alupega and the constant recitation of it in all ceremonial occasions, whether involving village members only or with outsiders, maintains the original foundation of a village, as embodied in its fa'alupega. In ranking matai titles and villages, the fa'alupega consequently fosters for family and village members a sense of their social roles.

However, speech is only one form of rite that promotes control and subjects members to a particular order. Duranti noted that in entering the realm of Samoan politics, referring to the traditional style politics as held in the village fono, he found that speech was only one of various forms of communication and interaction that was involved in such a process. He states

As soon as I left the domain of grammar to adventure in the domain of social action, I realised there was a lot more than speech to keep track of. Before speeches could be exchanged or a linguistic sound produced, there were conventional acts performed by human bodies. And before human bodies, there was space, not just empty space, but culturally meaningful space, that is, space always ready to be occupied by social personae engaged in specific activities (Duranti 1994:49).

The effect and strength of this process is immense

One needs only a few days, sometimes only a few hours, in a village to be told where it is appropriate to sit, when it is appropriate to talk, and what is appropriate to say to whoever is present (ibid:48).

Rites and rituals may become very complex and extend to areas not normally associated with such phenomena. Thomas Frank Lazar, in a study of a Samoan migrant community in Los Angeles found that Samoans, in post-migration phase were still applying and following traditional curing methods and patterns. A primary reason for this was
to serve as ‘bases for community social control’ (Lazar, T.F. 1985:300-1). The extended family organisation, a cogent part of the fa’aSāmoa, was maintained in part through the perpetuation of such patterns. Related to this is the perpetuation of the idea that certain illnesses are functioned by ‘aitu (spirits). A sickness is said to be derived from such a source because of a neglect in the performance of certain duties. Ineke M. Lazar concludes

The traditional Samoan as a social being receives and maintains his/her identity through continuous participation in the family. Dominant Samoan values demand that the individual conform to group ideals. Aitu illnesses are highly instrumental in maintaining group cohesion... (Lazar, I.M. 1985:177).

Conclusion

The good governance agenda for civil society has very strong implications for the fa’aSāmoa. According to the former, civil society institutions based on affective ties are obstacles to development. They are considered facilitative of corruption and of fostering inefficient affective ties between the public and private sector. The agenda thus seeks to eliminate such institutions from civil society, replacing them with those based on contracts. The fact that affective ties are central to the fa’aSāmoa, makes the latter susceptible to the changes sought by the good governance program.

However, various factors may prevent this from occurring. First, the good governance program is a new program lacking complete consensus between its major advocates. The agenda presented in this chapter is significantly drawn from discourse of the World Bank. While this is perhaps the most prominent advocate of the program, it is only one of many. It may be suggested that the implementation of the good governance agenda is unlikely to be administered in developing countries until a more comprehensive agreement about its content is found.

Second, the agenda is significantly the product of failures within countries that are geographically distant from Samoa. While no conclusion can be reached in this chapter about the similarities or differences between these countries and Samoa, it is not unfair to suggest Samoa’s distinctive features differentiate it from other countries. Therefore, it would be unjust to implement the changes sought through the agenda without first confirming that affective ties in Samoa also foster corruption.
Further study needs to be carried out concerning the role of the fa'aSāmoa vis-à-vis corruption. Such a study would also need to assess the likelihood of the good governance program taking root in Samoa. Moreover, it would need to assess the role of the fa'aSāmoa in other areas so as to understand the likely implications of eliminating affective ties. Nevertheless, these issues aside, it may be concluded that the good governance agenda for civil society will have a bearing on Samoa and its traditional system of fa'aSāmoa. The mere fact that discourse concerning such matters exists means that that path is already tread.

Notes

2 This term was first coined by Michael Mann in his extensive thesis on the development of nation states (1993). Mann used this term with specific reference to the way people were caged into classes, first by other, normally higher status classes and secondly by the nation-state as it evolved.
3 See UNDP (1997a, 1997b); World Bank (1992); International Bank for Reconstruction and International Monetary Fund (1997).
4 See also Grattan (1985:17). An important function of the matai is to represent the ‘aiga in fono. The fono usually exercises authority in matters concerning the village, which consequently means that it also encroaches on the sphere of the family. The fono has the right to exercise its authority on all members of the village, imposing fines according to Samoan customs for breach of village laws.
5 Rolff (1978:25) states, ‘This system of title succession requires years of subtle competition between those who aspire to chiefly rank. Such competition, in turn, enhances obedience, conformity, as well as economic productivity among the contenders. Precociousness and non-conformity are usually not rewarded.’
6 The term superiors is used here in relation to the different ranks within Samoan society. For example, matai are superior to the ‘aumaga, and consequently the latter are expected to give complete respect to the former.
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Donovan Storey

Governance: a framework for discussion

Throughout the 1990s the concept of governance, and particularly ‘good’ governance, has ascended to rarefied heights in mainstream development discourse. This has been most noticeable among aid donors, the Bretton Woods actors, and their descendents, such as the Asian Development Bank. Harpham and Boateng (1997:75) use the term alongside sustainable development in contemporary development discourse. This is despite the absence of any precise and accepted or agreed upon definition of the term, or how it may be applied to specific contexts, as in urban environments.

Notions of good governance have grown from originally narrow concerns over the impact of the state on economic growth, to now encompass a smorgasbord of so-called fundamentals which include state capacity, transparency, accountability, the thickening of civil society, the rule of law, and multi-party democratic systems (Macdonald 1998:23). Harpham and Boateng (1997:74) note that two rudimentary components of governance appear in the literature: the performance of governance, which includes public sector management, the legal framework, economic liberalism and competent policy formation and delivery services; and representational governance, that is, transparency, accountability, social justice, human rights and democracy. Good governance is also said to involve the emergence of progressive relationships between state and society. For example, Turner and Hulme
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(1997:151) note that good governance occurs when the state and civil society interrelate in a way that leads to a participatory, transparent and efficient government.

There is little new in the conceptual framework of governance not previously encapsulated within concerns over effective management, equitable and democratic structures of governing and some degree of accountability and transparency. What is new, perhaps, is the discourse that underpins the term, whether this is evaluated as a Western form of hegemony (Moore 1996), as discipline (Williams 1996), or as a mechanism of management in order to facilitate the interests of international capital (Stoker 1998) involving the Westernisation and commercialisation of the world. While systems of governance, however, are clearly context-specific, research that examines indigenous inter-relationships as a contribution to the Good Governance Agenda (GGA) is still in its infancy.1 To date good governance has been most strongly prescribed and funded from outside. In the Pacific Island context, aid donors such as Australia and New Zealand, and multilateral development institutions including the Asian Development Bank and World Bank, increasingly tie development assistance to public sector reform.2 Indeed, the promotion of good governance has become an important and new form of political conditionality in donor-recipient relations (Macdonald 1998:23). This political conditionality follows and exists alongside economic conditionalities imposed through structural adjustment. Subsequently, multilateral and bilateral donors have an increasingly significant voice in the politics of other countries.3

In this context, the relationship between economic adjustment programs and good governance is clear (Stoker 1998:23). The former is an example of determining economic structure and policy, while the latter centres on the disciplining of governable subjects (Williams 1996:172). According to Williams (1996:157), good governance denotes disciplinary relationships between the state, civil society, and international organisations, all of which are involved in the monitoring, watching and recording of one another, as in George Orwell’s depiction of society in 1984 (Williams 1996:166).

Good governance seeks to impose a structure of local government and to promote civil society of a recognisably Western sort. Exclusive of ethnic or traditional groups, the intention is that this society will interact with the state in a regularised and proceduralised way divorced from cultural values and indigenous models, which are, instead, blamed for the persistence of patrimonialism (Williams 1996:164). Indeed, Williams
notes that the World Bank ‘only wants to encourage the right kind of ‘capable’ groups [that is] those that utilise recognisably modern auditing and accounting procedures’ (1996:169). This forms an important part of the World Bank’s agenda concerning what is good for developing countries, for instance a state system and its bureaucracy which supports a market society and imbibes the World Bank’s development values (Williams 1996:171). This is particularly important in the Pacific context, where a false dichotomy between civil society, the people, and the state is often drawn (de Alcantara 1998:108; Hooper and James 1993).

In practice, the good government agenda is just as prone as previous policies and discourses to the ‘hard realities of actual governance’ and their subsequent resistance and indigenisation, or failure (Williams 1996:158, 173–4). From the state’s perspective, the temptation for regimes to resort to more direct control and to re-establish authority, particularly in periods of economic and social turbulence, is strong. Indeed, ‘it is far from clear that most of those involved in government have the capacity or indeed even the desire to behave in tune with such a “mission statement” and governing style’ as is promoted through the GGA (Stoker 1998:24). Although governments accept and sign-on to the GGA, they may subsequently seek to subvert, to manipulate or even to avoid the process, at least as long as assistance continues. In many cases, calls for good governance may be heralded by a range of regimes for rhetorical, rather than substantive reasons, and for often contradictory ends (de Alcantara 1998:106; Stoker 1998:18). Less insidiously, the political culture and character of state/society relations may also undermine the practice of good governance (Leftwich 1994).

The notion of what constitutes civil society and its role in good governance is also weakened when applied outside theoretical contexts. Civil society is often portrayed as an assemblage of community associations, usually formed into non-government organisations (NGOs) that represent community interests to the state. Little consideration is given to class, gender, ethnic or other sources of associational conflict, nor the inherently unequal relations which often determine power, knowledge and participation. The GGA expects communities to enter into some sort of contractual relationship with the state, in which they assume responsibilities previously undertaken by government. For example, good governance suggests that accountability can best be promoted through the decentralisation of government and bureaucracy, thereby enhancing people’s participation and decision making. This process is often referred to as the creation of an enabling state. Yet,
decentralisation is just as likely to facilitate a lack of accountability and block participation, particularly in contexts of unequal local power relations. It may also reinforce traditional practices of discrimination against the non-titled, women and youth. Indeed, more nationally representative fora and organs such as the state, may act, and be seen, to give greater voice and pay more heed to people's concerns than local level organisations or committees (see Wolfers 1985).

These incongruities between theory and practice provide dilemmas for the institutional approach adopted by the World Bank and others. Nevertheless, the socio-cultural and political context in which good governance is advocated is rarely acknowledged (Macdonald 1998:32-3). Neither is the issue of whether good global governance, including the role of multilateral development institutions, is evident. Leftwich (1994) notes in his critique of the term, that governance pays no attention to politics or to the often compelling, albeit for those involved, logical, factors which go toward explaining the way politics and governance is as it is in developing countries. Indeed, this lack of grounding of the term in historical and contextual studies makes it as susceptible to rebuttal, rejection or resistance as the previous state-led planning approach from which the GGA is supposed to release developing regimes and citizens.⁴

Consequently, if good governance is to emerge, it cannot, and should not, be based on precisely the same foundations across all societies. Governance cannot be separated from its cultural context which defines and regulates competition for power, notions of equity, and of justice. Neither can these factors be seen ahistorically, as today's norms are the outcome of generations of struggle and represent a constant state of flux as power relations between groups wax and wane (Harpham and Boateng 1997:73).

This chapter examines the implications of the conflict between models of governance and the practice of governance, in relation to the demands of urban management in Samoa. I draw on the framework used by Macdonald (1998:40) in his work on Kiribati. Macdonald carried out a comparative study of the institutional definitions of governance (in his example the World Bank) and of the actual 'underlying political structured processes [in order] to explain the nature of government, policy formation and administration' in a particular context. Only through greater analysis and attention to the divergence of institutional and actual models of governance will we be able to gain an understanding of the impact, or otherwise, of the GGA in local contexts, or an appreciation of
the role and nature of agency which acts to filter outside models. This also provides an opportunity to explore forms of governance more relevant to, and embedded in, local contexts and which have a greater chance of working.

**What is urban governance?**

Recent interest in urban governance reflects the increasing role of cities in national and global life. In non-Western contexts especially, citizens are most likely to be exposed to and confront notions of governance within a city. Citizens are also most commonly exposed to a culture centred on the concentration of capital generated by Western technology and techniques of production within a city (Harpham and Boateng 1997:74). This increased attention to cities also implies that all is not well in urban management. Until recently, urban planning and management approaches, which are the legacy of efforts of Western countries to control and shape their own urban growth, have dominated urban management in developing countries. The rules, regulations and plans which formed the basis of urban planning and management techniques have remained paramount throughout the development planning decades of the post-war years. In this period of urban sprawl, planning often treated urban growth in essentially negative terms. Urban planning and management were often administered by the public or colonial service, and after independence through the ongoing use of qualified town planners and consultants from the West. Urban development was often overseen by a supposedly neutral referee, the town planner, who sought to adopt Western planning principles in order to demarcate and to determine the use of resources by, and for, urban citizens (Devas 1993:65–9).

In the Pacific, post-war concerns over the growth, form, and order of emerging cities led to efforts to create municipal authorities, which became the fashionable mechanism of urban governance from the 1950s. Since then, urban agencies dealing with services, administration, the development of infrastructure and the management of increasing populations have mushroomed throughout the Pacific. By the 1980s, however, there was general dissatisfaction and disenchantment with the centralised approach and the performance of municipal authorities and their organs. This was particularly the case in terms of donors, who then favoured a move toward decentralisation and local government, and the evolution of a new corporatist model for urban governance (Devas 1993:90–3; Jones 1996). These principles, once again borrowed from the
West, emphasise the contractual method of inter-government and state-society relations, pronounced in New Zealand, and grounded in key phraseology or governance-speak. They include concepts of cost-effectiveness and cost-recovery, efficiency, accountability, and transparency (Devas 1993:92–3). As Rakodi and Devas note, 'the need for greater accountability of governments and government agencies, for opportunities for electoral choice, for transparency in decision-making processes, especially over the allocation of resources, for greater efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of public services, are all central to improved urban management...' (Rakodi and Devas 1993:273).

Consequently, urban concepts, principles and models applied in developing countries have often been more relevant to the development and current context of the Western world. Cities in industrialised countries are generally centralised and compact. In comparison, cities in developing countries are characterised by the decentralised model of urban expansion into surrounding hinterlands, nearby villages and customary lands. Cities in developing countries have much more complex forms and social structures than is often assumed. Consequently, simplified input-output models or notions of urban governance based on concepts of Western urban development may be quite irrelevant. As Bately (1993) has argued, the previous urban management model of strong bureaucracies, master planning and regulation evolved to meet the needs of industrial cities of the West. The new model of urban governance responds to the needs of fine-tuning service delivery and urban administration when many of the basic needs have already been met. This is far from the case in developing towns and cities where a strong urban administration may still be appropriate and necessary (Rakodi and Devas 1993:285).

It is imperative then that urban management and structures are more closely integrated into the realities of urban growth in particular contexts. More effective urban administration requires credibility and legitimacy of policy. Otherwise, decisions made have no standing. Existing channels of communication need to be built upon, rather than challenged (Rakodi and Devas 1993:272–3). Institutions that are relevant to people, have meaning and generally work, should form the basis of policy (Rakodi and Devas 1993:272–3). While noting both the benefits of greater urban accountability and the needs of sovereignty, Rakodi and Devas (1993:295) offer a middle ground. They suggest that new urban management and governance philosophies need to be better informed through experimenting with, extending and replicating elements of 'what is held
to constitute good governance at every level' within indigenous systems, philosophies and locally situated realities. A much more sustainable and inclusive approach may well be the result.

**Samoa**

Appeals for good governance are now commonly voiced from government, civil society and the private sector in Samoa (see Macpherson and Macpherson 1998:88). Letters to the *Samoa Observer* citing government corruption and an apparent lack of transparency and accountability, often bemoan the absence of good governance. The state also remains committed to this call. In his 1997–98 budget address, the current Prime Minister, Tuilaepa Sa’ilele Malielegaoi stated that the government ‘resolved to make Western Samoa a model developing country in the region’ through striving for ‘good governance and sound economic policies’ which would bring ‘greater benefits and opportunities for advancement to our people’ (*Samoa Observer* 29 May 1998). For government, good governance reflects the desire to achieve a greater role for market forces, increased competition, and a new partnership with the private sector (Samoa 1996). The public demand is for greater equity, accountability and justice. Their calls are typically for a fair go and a voice in the management of the city and beyond. For donors, the emphasis is more on public sector reform, known as rightsizing. Typically, the emphasis is on refining management techniques through the introduction of private sector procedures and skills.

Harpham and Boateng (1997:66) have noted that ‘the emphasis on good governance in many situations would suggest that the present system of governance is wrong.’ This raises several important questions. Does governance in Samoa constitute good or bad governance, and to what extent is this driven by underlying cultural and political forces, the function of politics, the operation of state institutions, and the nature of state–society relations? To what extent does fa’aSāmoa actually constitute good, or at least, effective governance? How does fa’aSāmoa come into conflict with the good governance agenda? Will these conflagrations lead to greater problems in an urban context, or to gradual reform over time? Finally, what are the implications for the future management of Samoan urban populations? Important factors here include traditionally prescribed notions of accountability, of justice and fairness; methods of communication and getting things done; the use of authority in certain contexts; the personal nature of politics, and the centrality of the ‘aiga and *nu‘u* over party or policy concerns.
Davidson (1967:262) noted that the gap between the state and strong local autonomous groups in Samoa has made the implementation of development programs difficult in the past. This is accentuated by the lack of a middle ground between the national *fono*, and the village. Without a provincial or local administrative system, power is mediated through the *pulenu‘u* or the *sui o malo*, from the country’s 350 village councils directly to the state. The village *fono* has an impressive range of functions, powers and sanctions.

The *fono* acts as an administrative body, town council, arbitrator, legislator and director of the village labour force...the day to day organisation of the village...setting standards of hygiene, morals and behaviour; for determining the general patterns of life; for overseeing any communal economic activity and entertainment; and for ensuring that its decisions are carried out (Thomas 1985:223).

Consequently, ‘the village unit is in many respects politically and administratively autonomous [and] this autonomy is fiercely guarded and is both recognised and accepted by the centre’ (Thomas 1985:215) In fact, the village *fono* may be more likely to attract greater loyalty than the national executive: ‘People are deeply conscious of their association with their village and district, with their position in the linear structure. To most of them, the decisions of the village *fono* seem of more immediate relevance than those of central government’ (Davidson 1967:428).

Even in the urban context, the *fono* still acts as the paramount forum for governance, and concepts such as *fa‘aSamoan* and the *’aiga* remain very important in Samoan life, within both urban and peri-urban villages. Consequently, any model of good governance needs to accept the legitimacy and capacity of these organisations and social ties. Although unevenly practiced, the role and power of the *matai* remain important in allocating resources, such as land, in looking after the family unit, maintaining honour and consensus and in regulating all aspects of village life (Thomas 1985:215–6). For example, the visibly poorer and marginal urban villages of Apia are those with the weakest social units and ties to traditional political authorities.

**Urban Samoa: Apia**

In the post-war period, Apia has steadily grown from a small European-dominated port of a few thousand people into a capital city and environs of nearly 50,000. Today, Apia is the national centre of industry, commerce, and transportation and is the only recognisable urban centre in the
country. As the commercial focal point of Samoa, most of the activities in the secondary and tertiary sectors, including manufacturing, restaurants, hotels and government, which account for over 40 per cent of GDP are located in Apia. So too is over 90 per cent of the country’s paid employment, including both public and private sectors, as well as the country’s principal educational, health and social services (World Bank 1995:82).

The problems Apia faces are not only typical of cities in developing countries, but also reflect the uniqueness of its geographical and cultural place within Samoa’s spatial development. Problems include the need for increased freehold land for economic development, greater environmental protection, the provision of urban services to sprawling village-based communities, improved waste management, and affordability, especially in housing and land. These challenges are underpinned by the struggle to develop appropriate and acceptable political structures and administrative procedures for managing the town’s development (ADB 1996a:31). In his 1947 narrative of North West ‘Upolu and Apia, Davidson describes ‘thatched open-sided fale surrounded by crotons and coleus, by roses, zinnias, and hibiscus...built round village greens and backed by coconut palms and breadfruit trees, like pavilions set by some eighteenth century landscape gardener in an exotic park’ (Davidson 1967:5). Today, the same coastline is also the site of widespread toxification, urban-based pollution, and a rapidly increasing population with decreasing access to employment, land and basic services.

Apia’s decentralised growth presents particular problems for urban administration and models based on centralised administrative systems. Most of the population growth of Apia is in the greater Apia peri-urban area to the east and West of the centre, with some urban villages close to Apia having populations of 1,000 or more (ADB 1996a:22). This greater urban area extends past Faleolo Airport to the West and Falefa to the east, covering some 50 kilometres. Although at first Apia appears as a chaotically expanding city consuming an increasing amount of rich agricultural land and poorly planned peri-urban villages,7 for Samoans ‘the boundaries are readily discernible, and each village, respecting the territories of others, remains within itself a tightly-knit, distinct social unit’ (Fox and Cumberland 1962:117). Apia itself is made up of 50 villages, each with its own fono and matai, which continue to be focal points of community, albeit unevenly. Even in urban and peri-urban villages, the nu‘u remains at the centre of physical and cultural life.
Urban villages though are different to *nu’u* in rural Samoa. Diversity is the norm, with some ‘*aiga* having access to land, crops, and strong ties of *matai* to government authorities. Others are characterised by a shortage of land, few subsistence crops, large numbers of migrants and poor community cohesion. For example, land in the poorer urban villages tends to be leased from either the Church or European landowners. These villages are generally occupied by migrants who are dependent on wage employment: ‘Many of these villages lack traditional unity, have no *matai* titles of their own, no *malae*, no firm village organisation, and no ties with a distinctive area of land’ (Fox and Cumberland 1962:275). They often constitute the worst housing, environmental and social conditions in the country, occupying the low-lying swampy mangrove land near industrial and commercial centres.

The weakness of the state and the economy in providing for a growing urban population has reiterated the significance of, and dependence upon, village safety-nets for urban residents. The latter’s capacity to survive this increased dependence has been variable. Increased impoverishment in the cash economy has been a catalyst for several demonstrations against the government and for demands to increase the minimum wage, which was raised to US$0.46/hour in 1998. Public concern has grown over the livelihoods of urban youth, where an increasing number may be seen walking and working on city streets during the day. In 1998, an editorial in the *Samoa Observer*, noted ‘malnourished children, unschooled youths and squalid living in the villages as signs of threatening environments for children.’ It went on to cite a recent United Nations report which found that 60 per cent of children treated in the Apia National Hospital were affected by some form of malnutrition (*Samoa Observer* 16 January 1998). Official concern over the experiences of Samoan urban youth led to the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs conducting an Apia Urban Youth Survey in 1994 (Samoa 1996).

Policy trends point to a future emphasis on urban-led growth, augmenting the need for some form of better and more effective urban governance. It has been argued that, in order to stimulate a lagging economy, another Yazaki is needed. A wire-harness manufacturing plant which opened in 1991 with the encouragement of the Samoan government via a ST$10 million building, Yazaki is the country’s biggest employer, with over 1,500 workers. Wages, however, are generally low and staff turnover and absenteeism are high. Production workers receive an annual income of ST$5,000 which includes overtime. As suggested in
an editorial in the *Samoa Observer* (17 April 1998), this is barely enough to participate in customary commitments such as *fa’alavelave*. The emphasis of national economic policy, however, is still based on the Yazaki model of urban growth, with the government recently announcing plans for the opening of a Chinese garment factory, a cannery and a chocolate processing plant, all to be located within or adjacent to the capital. A low-wage, migrant-driven industrial economy will present a great challenge to both traditional authorities and government policy in the future management of Apia and its environs.

**Attempts at administration**

The administrative history of Apia is one of a protracted struggle to establish formal Western-based municipal structures to manage its growth and development. In the mid to late nineteenth century, early European contact and settlement was greatest in Apia, where, as a result of the diminished power of the *fono*, the need for political reorganisation was most urgent (Davidson 1967:39–41). However, the establishment of a separate urban administrative unit has proved to be difficult, and today Apia continues to be governed by a plethora of national bureaucracies (Ward and Ashcroft 1998:135). The first attempt at a municipal authority emerged in 1879. It was ‘to be controlled by the consuls and representatives of the foreign residents’ and was charged with maintaining and administering ‘law and order, the carrying out of public works, and the control of the port’ (Davidson 1967:41–2). Another administration was established in 1887, but was then dismantled under the German protectorate in 1900. Each of these early administrations resulted from the protection of European interests and capital, and the establishment of freehold land. They were a source of antagonism and anger among Samoans, with the municipality becoming known as the ‘*ele’ele sa*, that is, the forbidden ground, a term ‘used in bitterness and reproach’ (Davidson 1967:74).

Resistance, from both the state and *matai*, to the emergence of a municipal authority has continued ever since. Although the state has considered several proposals, momentum for change has been negligible. A range of reasons, typical to other urban contexts throughout the Pacific (see Jones 1996) have contributed to this resistance: fears that a separate authority would threaten communal land tenure and traditional authority; that it would challenge the previously powerful roles of central government departments; that a municipal authority is unaffordable; and a general perception that urban issues are not as crucial to Pacific
Island countries’ development as rural ones, are commonly reiterated positions. Consequently, the Asian Development Bank has recently noted that ‘the history of urban reform in Apia is a protracted tale of attempts to develop a municipal government for Apia’ (1996c:46). As a result, legislative and administrative machinery for managing growth and change in Apia has remained at the preparatory phase of development. Despite several technical reports, consultant visits and working groups suggesting the need for an urban council,‘there are no recognised urban plans for Apia and no legislative or administrative systems for preparing, adopting or administering any such plans’ (Asian Development Bank 1996a:3).

The latest call for more effective urban management, that is, management modelled on Western urban theory, has come from the Asian Development Bank. It has proposed that an urban management commission, with the status of a department, be established. In the case of urban Samoa, however, it may be argued that the pressure to maintain traditional authority is greater than that advocating a non-matai based administration. The management of Apia has been, and continues to be, very much a matter for the public domain and the local nu’u level (World Bank 1995:88). In many ways this reflects the power of local authorities in national politics, as it is matai who make the decisions at the parliamentary level. To create an organisation based not on status but professional expertise, may create a precedent which undermines matai both in society and politics. An independent municipal authority, based on the concepts of urban planning, has failed to emerge in Samoa because of its non-acceptance by both national and traditional leaders alike. To achieve acceptance, any future doctrines of better urban management will need to account for fa’aSāmoa. Do then, the principles of good governance stand a greater chance of being accepted into Samoan politics and society, and will they act as the organisational basis of a more sustainable urban future?

**An example: the Western Samoan Water Authority**

The provision of water can be used to demonstrate how efforts to create good governance introduce concepts and relationships which run counter to fa’aSāmoa and to the pule of customary heads, thus making the success of such enterprises problematic. In 1991 the Western Samoan Water Authority (WSWA) was established to act as a ‘commercially oriented, autonomous, modern water utility’ (World Bank 1995:96–7), and to
alleviate intermittent and poor supply, and the deterioration of potable water quality (ibid:92). As with much of the good governance agenda, neo-liberal and neo-classical economic rhetoric guides the role of WSWA. For example, in its duties the WSWA is expected to enter into a compact with the consumer.

Such a compact would aim to increase consumer awareness of the costs of providing high quality urban water and sewerage/sanitation services as well as the hygiene and health implications of poor quality services...It would call for recognition of a community role in quality control through consumer feedback on service deficiencies and clear accountability by the service agency for service performance. Community leaders, women's groups, NGOs, and churches would play a crucial role in this effort and the full support of the Government would be essential (World Bank 1995:99–100).

The World Bank also suggests that this may involve an increased role for communities in managing sewerage disposal, solid waste collection, and keeping community drains clean (World Bank 1995:100). In order to iron out any problems, the World Bank has stressed the need for 'changes in community attitudes and practices' and 'responsible behaviour' in order 'to achieve maximum benefit from the service improvements', particularly in regards to environmental conservation. Indeed, 'the viability of the strategy must be premised on the community at large buying into this agenda' (World Bank 1995:102). This creates an important, although passive role for customary authorities. In seeking what it calls an alternative path of action outside the establishment of a municipal council (ibid), the World Bank's objectives rely on the close knit community structure which, according to the Bank, is effective in disseminating information and is also able to quickly adapt programs to changing circumstances (ibid:103). Matai are then expected to take on the role of good governance educators in terms of water and sanitation programs. In the case of water management, cultural systems are clearly portrayed as a vehicle for getting things done, as well as being characterised as an impediment to better urban management: 'The very strong traditions of community involvement, and consensus decision making in Western Samoa would considerably facilitate implementation of such (sanitation) schemes' (ibid:93).

To date, however, it has been difficult to limit demand through the installation of a user-pays metered system, which was resisted by many matai. There have been similar difficulties managing the quality of supply due to the clearing of watershed areas on village land in order to plant taro. The Authority has had to battle the belief that access to water is a
right, and the refusal of matai to comply with the notion that a government department should be making money from their village. This had led to the widespread vandalism of metres, continual election promises to reclaim the right to a free supply, and critical public opinion and suspicion of the Samoan Water Authority.

The externally derived expectations and logic inherent to the GGA are antithetical to the realities of current urban administration in Samoa. Using certain government powers against traditional authorities is difficult in many contexts because they are controversial and contested (Connell and Lea 1995:91). The perception that traditional Samoan structures can be harnessed toward institutionalising neo-liberal agendas is highly suspect. The opportunity to develop institutions and relationships that will then form the basis of an accepted and sustainable system of governance, is lost. As such, the GGA is likely to meet the same fate as urban planning models of the past. Apia needs better urban governance. In meeting this goal, what is then needed are theoretical approaches more closely aligned with the spatial, cultural and political processes of the city and country.

**Conclusions: towards more effective urban governance in Samoa**

This analysis of water management illustrates the difficulties and shortcomings of applying concepts of urban governance across poorly understood traditional boundaries and cultural contexts. The GGA fails to recognise the complexity of cultural systems which may impede urban development agendas. The argument that ‘local political institutions with a high level of local autonomy will strengthen accountability and responsiveness in the activities of government’ (Asian Development Bank 1996c:49) lacks empirical support in the context of urban Samoa. For example, decentralisation, if it means the ceding of powers to non-matai organisations, will involve a loss of direct political control from the centre. It threatens to increase the costs of community development as decentralised authorities seek to recover expenses through initiating user-pays systems, as well as devaluing the role of matai and village fono.

Apia’s present and future management needs to be considered within the wider context of debates over the state, vis-à-vis the fono, ‘aiga and nuu’u. The responsibilities and costs of development traverse customary land and traditional authority. Subsequently, any significant change requires extraordinary levels of consultation and participation if it is to
make headway (Connell and Lea 1995:72–3). Unless models of good urban governance recognise these factors, not as externalities but as central to urban development issues, then it is likely they will go the same way as the urban management planning models of the past. As the GGA derives its inspiration from the private rather than the public sphere, local factors are often ignored or even more frequently, are blamed for urban problems and the lack of ability and capacity to address them effectively. The performance of urban authorities in Pacific Island countries are given particularly bad press. For example, local politics and inter-departmental incohesion in urban administration are often portrayed as impediments to development and good governance. The GGA, however, with its backing from donor agencies and governments, is rarely seen in the same ideological and political light. Their agendas, after all, are sold as technical and managerial in scope (Devas 1993:96).

In short, there is a need for a better understanding of the nature of urban politics including the complex role of civil society. Balance is needed between negative accounts of the state and the glorification of civil society (McCarney 1996:9). Arguments that urban governance can, and should, be improved upon are generally agreed on from all quarters. But, there are many paths to development (Turner and Hulme 1997:236).

In its present form, the underlying discourse and managerial philosophies of GGA remain just another imported concept: 'The propensity of donor nations, and the multilaterals they control, to transfer models for public policy making, planning and administration to developing countries without adequately considering contextual differences seems set to continue' (ibid:237). Without adequate political analysis and examination of the circuits of power which link state and society, outcomes are likely to be as negative as positive, and resistance will ensure that the one size fits all model will remain shelved (ibid:237–41). In these terms, the Asian Development Bank was accurate when, in a recent report it stated that

The challenge, then, is to develop an institutional framework which can meet the urban government requirements for preparing and administering urban plans, the coordination requirements for integrating services provision and development control, and the central agency requirements for administering a planning system (Asian Development Bank 1996c:48).

Given the liberal and disciplinary overtones that underpin the GGA, and the failure of its program to develop an adequate theory of the state or to define the nature of state/society relations, it is evident that the real challenge of governance research is to establish and examine urban
organisations that are relevant to local contexts. The continued use and
dependence on traditional ties by Samoan’s, their deep-seated sensitivity
over land alienation, and a bureaucracy which is often unwilling to
relinquish its role in urban affairs are significant and real impediments
to the GGA. Nevertheless, urban maldevelopment, and Apia’s increasing
role in the national economy and society make the need for effective
urban governance more acute. For researchers, the challenge lies in
tracking the ideas and discourse of the good governance agenda in a
real world context, as well as examining outcomes, and establishing what
forms of governance are meaningful, sustainable and acceptable to all.
Failure to achieve this will result in the good governance agenda
competing for similar shelf space with the urban planning proposals of
the past.

Notes

1. The GGA’s compatibility with internal sociopolitical structures and
cultural frameworks has been of limited interest among donors, but
is an important constituent in the acceptability and sustainability of
the promotion of good governance. In essence, the GGA needs a
better understanding of agency if the doctrine is to be, and remain,
relevant (see Edwards 1989).

2. Macpherson and Macpherson (1998) have suggested that Samoa’s
dependence on the Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy
(MIRAB), particularly in relation to New Zealand, has made the
call for reform more desperate and the role of outside donors and
organisations all the greater. This is despite the questionable
benefits which may accrue from adopting these models (see Bale
and Dale 1998; Schick 1998).

3. The promotion of the GGA has been particularly important for the
World Bank, as well as others, as its charters avow non-interference
in political matters. The subsequent adoption of the principles of
good governance has thus allowed lending institutions, including
bi-lateral donors, to emancipate themselves from an intellectual
and practical dead-end with regard to the politics of development

4. Rallying against the GGA from an anti-colonial framework does
not necessarily ignore or negate the potentially deleterious effects
of corruption, maladministration and exploitation, often couched
as traditionalism which is evidenced in many countries, including
Pacific Island countries (see Keesing 1989; Rutz 1987).
Likewise, traditional politics remains powerful, despite constitutional shifts in the early 1990s. While multi-party elections are held, and franchise has been extended, elections are still characterised by patrimonial relations through gift-giving, the returning of favours, support for matai, and the censure of open criticism. Despite the appearance of party politics, it is individuals, and their status, kinship and personality-driven politics which remain at the heart of Samoan political culture and representation (see So’o 1998).

If peri-urban populations are included, then Greater Apia’s population would have been 48,616 in 1991, or some 30 per cent of the national total, constituting around 55 per cent of all national population growth in the 1980s (ADB 1996a:21). On current trends, by 2011 Apia’s greater population is likely to surpass 75,000.

Of Apia’s projected population growth, it is estimated that three-quarters will live in fringe urban lands; with a further 10 per cent along coastal fringes; and 15 per cent in the water catchment areas (ADB 1996a:44). This growth is expected to seriously impact on coastal and water catchment environments, and to lead to further degradation of freshwater and coastal marine habitats, water quality, and health (see Storey 1999).

Sturms’s 1984 urban plan noted that a master plan, two zoning plans and 13 development plans had been prepared in the preceding 15 years alone.
Women’s NGOs within the new governance agenda are they still based on *alofa*?

Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop

In October 1998 a national newspaper reported that a young Savai’i mother and her newborn child had passed away in childbirth (*Samoa Observer* 23 October 1998). Though traumatic in itself, the incident was more so in Samoa which has always prided itself on its community based system of health care, a system featuring women’s health committees working in partnership with the government health department.

When this item appeared in the press, public responses included ‘did this mother attend a health clinic?’ and, ‘aren’t the *komiti tumamā* (women’s committees) doing their job?’ These comments emphasise the strong belief that community institutions—in this case the women’s committees—are responsible, in fact have a duty to ensure that village families enjoy a good quality of life. Implied also, is a fear that community institutions may not be doing this today.

The governance agenda of the 1990s has recognised the vital contribution of community groups—such as the women’s committees—to national development. Non-government organisations (NGOs) have gained prominence in development theory and debate as the groups best equipped to ensure that the benefits of development are evenly spread. While government-led development is seen to stifle local initiative and create a dependency mentality, NGOs are regarded as being close to communities and well-equipped to identify cost-effective and relevant solutions. Global reports suggest an explosion in NGO activities as groups hasten to fill the ‘gaps’ created by government cutbacks and structural...
adjustment policies. Pacific governments also are increasingly relying on NGOs to deliver essential public services which they cannot provide, influenced as they are by the effects of global recessions and downturns in the local economy.

This chapter reviews how women's NGOs, and the services these groups provide, are being influenced by restructuring measures aimed at drawing NGOs into the national governance agenda. This includes a review of NGO responses to the effects these structural changes are having. For example, are women's NGOs wholeheartedly accepting incorporation and all this implies, displaying some degree of acceptance of these measures, or are they resisting and trying to organise 'outside' these structures? Samoa's women's health committees are the vehicle for this case study. These community groups fit the NGO definition (below) with the exception that membership of these groups is not so much voluntary as expected in most villages. Using the women's health committees also enables comparisons over time, because these groups have been in a 'health partnership' with government since the early 1930s. According to the Commonwealth Secretariat, Women's committees are

- voluntary in their formation and participation
- independent—operate legally and are controlled by their own governing body
- not for personal profit
- not self-serving in aims and related values, but dedicated to improving the situation of disadvantaged persons and promoting the well being of society as a whole (Commonwealth Foundation 1997).

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first examines some expectations underlying the establishment of women's health committees as community networks for the delivery of government health programs. I argue that the management processes and expectations established in these early days (the 1930s) influence today's health partnerships. Part two outlines factors influencing women's NGOs today, with particular focus on restructuring measures. It is proposed that rather than unifying NGOs into a cohesive national force, government restructuring measures are contributing to a fragmentation of the NGO community, including the marginalisation of traditional women's NGOs. Women's awareness of the effects of changes on their NGO role is also discussed. The third part evaluates the status of the women's committee–government health partnership today. Questions are raised about the future of this
partnership, and indeed the very future of service to the community, traditionally given voluntarily in the spirit of *alo'afia* (love and respect).

**The NGO–government health partnership: 1930s–90s**

Village responsibility for village development is at the heart of the *fa'aSāmoa*. Today as in traditional times, villages operate as semi-autonomous polities under the leadership of the two main village institutions—the village council of chiefs and the women’s committees. Service (*tautua*) to the family is the key driving force in these family-based systems. Service is also the way family ties and feelings of identity are nurtured and is a major means for status raising as well. Service is necessary for family survival. The way family members ‘serve’ is determined by their status, gender and age grouping. There are two status groups for women—the ‘daughters’ of the village have responsibility for hospitality and ceremony, while the ‘in-married wives’ look to the domestic and homemaking tasks necessary to ensure the smooth running of the household. Wives have traditionally been considered the lowest status group in their husband’s village—they have no rights or public role and must serve their husband’s family just as loyally as he does. Although group roles were traditionally ‘set’ in this way, groups enjoyed considerable autonomy in the way they performed their roles, in fact, the greater the flair and imagination displayed by groups, the greater the public recognition of their service to the village.

In the 1930s the New Zealand administration incorporated these vigorouscustomary institutions into a national system of shared responsibility for village development. In this system, if a village wanted a school, church or other community asset the village would be responsible for providing the land, and for building and maintaining the asset, while the government provided the technical staff to run the facility. As part of these development partnerships, women’s health committees were introduced in every village with the aim of ensuring that families in even the most isolated rural areas had access to essential health services, sanitation and nutrition programs. The classification of ‘health’ as women’s work complemented the allocation of ‘economic’ work to males taking place during these years.

In this national health strategy women’s groups were integrated into a national plan for the very first time. Up until then, each village had complete responsibility for village development: now a national agency
(the New Zealand government through the Department of Health) was assuming part of this responsibility. Another innovation was that all females (both sisters and wives) were grouped together in one committee, a practice at odds with their customary separation. This change offered wives a public role in their husband’s village for the very first time. Anecdotal reports indicate that wives’ ‘desire to serve’ added considerable zest as well as tension to committee activities.

Accounts indicate that the duties classified under the rubric of ‘health’ were extremely wide ranging, and made little distinction between ‘private’ and ‘public’ responsibility. Furthermore the organisational style adopted by the committees was quite prescriptive, no doubt reflecting prevailing village norms and practices (Box 6.1). Both of these features have relevance for today’s governance agenda.

As reported, the komiti tumama took on responsibility for village health with such gusto that New Zealand’s Director of Health described the health partnership as ‘the most brilliant illustration of the possibilities of preventive medicine’ (Lambert 1928, cited in Thomas 1986:9). The sharp drop in infant and maternal mortality rates during these years was attributed to the committees’ efficiency.

The health partnership

Several factors in this health partnership have relevance for today’s governance agenda. First, while both the Department of Health (DOH) and the komiti tumama shared a common vision of good health, there were discrepancies. The DOH held a national vision; the komiti tumama commitment was to village health and, moreover, komiti tumama achievements were recognised and evaluated within the ambit of daily village life. This difference is critical given the predominantly national focus of current health restructuring measures.

Second, although there is some debate as to the motives and perceptions underlying this cooperative relationship (Macpherson 1990:80), both groups had a clear understanding of their role and depended upon the cooperation of the other. The DOH had modern health expertise but didn’t have the community networks for delivering their health message, nor the capacity to develop networks. The komiti tumama provided these networks: they ensured the health education went right into the homes of every village family and that families observed good health practice in their daily lives. Third, what might have been a
Box 6.1  The duties of the women’s health committees

The committee as a whole was responsible for ensuring that all women and children attended the monthly clinic, which was visited by the doctor or nurse, and that health regulations determined by government were enforced. The committee was expected to conduct a daily first aid clinic; to hold a weekly meeting with all women; to enforce a curfew each evening for children under 12 years of age; to ensure that all children stayed indoors during the hot hours of the day; to superintend the daily bathing of all children; to make a weekly inspection of all village houses and cooking houses; and to report any severe thrashing of children. The committee was instructed to discourage any fa’aSamoa marriages (marriages made outside the church); ensure that pregnant women did not stoop, weed, carry heavy loads or stand waist deep in the lagoon fishing, and that lactating women did not work in agriculture but stayed at home where they could regularly feed their infants.... Committee leaders were instructed to read to all village women the health articles which appeared each month in the government newspaper O le Savali (Thomas 1986:6).

very top-down system was mediated by a very remarkable pioneer group of district nurses. Nursing pioneer Momoe Kuresa has been described as follows

Momoe saw the women’s committees as the key to good health for women and their children. She also believed that the village groups would assist in the overall development of women. For her this was the most effective way to promote and maintain health...I know that she believed that improvement in sanitation and hygiene, control of infectious diseases such as yaws and filariasis, and the construction of many school hospitals and churches would never have been possible without their (women’s committee) involvement, commitment and the deep concern the Samoan women felt for their children and communities (Barclay et al. 1998:16).

Even in the 1990s district nurses walked the village back roads to make sure ‘we aren’t missing some children’ and to scold mothers who failed to bring their children to the monthly health clinic (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1991b). These district nurses were the vital and probably the most under-acknowledged feature of this community based health system.

The role of the women’s committees

In addition to their keen desire to improve village health, the komiti tumama became successful community networks for health training for
a number of inter-related reasons. First, these groups adhered to customary norms and practices—such as the preference for gendered domains of activity and the use of social expectations and sanctions to ensure that collective goals set by this group were met. This is seen in the *asiasiga* (visitation), a strategy commonly used by committees. In the *asiasiga*, the committee decide the target goals, the time for evaluation and the evaluation procedure. On the appointed day, members conduct a public inspection and usually levy a small fine on members who fail to achieve the set target. (This fine might be a pot of cocoa for the next meeting or a small sum of money.) Table 6.1 shows the very comprehensive nature a women’s committee *asiasiga* program can take, in this case encompassing nutrition, handicraft production, agriculture, environmental health and sanitation targets.

Second, responsibility for health meant increased status for the women involved and a new and added domain for showing their service to the family. Committee activities gave women the chance to develop their leadership skills and to extend their social and political roles. This ‘springboard’ effect was possible because committees had considerable autonomy in the programs they targeted and the way they carried out these programs. The women’s experience of autonomy and independence in their decision making in turn gave them the opportunity to foster their own initiative and competency. This increase in the confidence and leadership capacity of the women is also visible in the myriad of projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6.1</th>
<th><strong>Asiasiga, Siumu Women’s Committee program (1989)</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February*</td>
<td>Fences for garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 <em>u’a</em> plants (mulberry for tapa making)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 <em>laufala</em> plants (for weaving)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March*</td>
<td>Checking of plants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toilet and cooking block inspection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>10 floor mats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 <em>lau lau</em> (plaited food serving mats)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Large pot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June*</td>
<td>Mosquito nets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>House yards free of weeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Check March infringements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>ie toga</em> (fine mats, number to be decided)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * indicates an *asiasiga savali* (household inspection)
successfully undertaken by the committees. Indeed, as is the way with village politics, women’s committees saw it as a personal challenge to make sure their amenities (and training programs) matched and hopefully bettered those of neighbouring villages. For example, committees would fundraise to build their own village health centres, equip these with basic supplies and modern equipment, and outfit them with accommodation for their nurses. Box 6.2 is an example of the extremely independent and skilled way women’s committees work to achieve their targets, the combination of traditional and modern fundraising strategies they employ and, how women are able to rally the support of the whole village for their project. This group was very knowledgeable about avenues of assistance, and had no qualms in approaching government and donors. Box 6.2 also shows how government and donor agency staff were very receptive to requests from this small community group.

While the priority continued to be health issues, by the 1990s komiti tumama programs had broadened to include income generation programs for women and their families, political empowerment and training in

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**Box 6.2  Building the nurse’s home, Siumu 1989**

The Siumu Women’s Committee decided to build a Nurses’ Home. Executive members approached the Minister of Health (MOH) first for support, because they believed that as the nurse was a government employee, government should contribute to the costs of the nurse’s accommodation.

The President of the Committee said, ‘We asked him, what is the duty of the government and what is our duty?’ He said ‘...we haven’t got any money.’ Then he said ‘why don’t you do what the x Committee did? Go and see the German representative.’ Following the MOH’s advice the committee secured a donation from the German aid representative, which met the major part of the costs. The committee then held village dances and other forms of traditional entertainment to raise the balance. Next, when the Minister of Health was unable to say when the Health Department Builders would be available to build the facility, the committee women decided to hire their own builder. This builder stipulated that the committee must provide the building materials. And so, the women committee members travelled back and forth to Apia (a distance of half an hour by road) checking wholesale prices, bringing the estimates back to the committee executive for approval and finally making the necessary purchases. When building began, the village males cleared a site and helped with the construction while committee members fed the labourers well. When finally completed, the builder was paid his fee and honoured in the customary way with gifts of iei toga (fine mats).

sustainable resource-use practices, advocacy on nuclear issues, and programs on AIDS awareness and issues of domestic violence against women and children. Over time, women's committees came to play a central role in every village development activity and were considered to be traditional groups. The women's committees relied on donor assistance to supplement their fundraising efforts, but women's labour was unpaid, voluntary, and given in the spirit of *alofa* to the community. A prominent woman leader sums up the national perception of women's committees.

In terms of real power, women are the dominant influence in the village...ask anybody about village projects...it is the women's committee that provide the energy, the drive and the staying power which ensures the completion and success of a village project (Filifia 1987).

The committees' strong footing in the customary ways was a major factor in their success. However, this also introduced some tensions into the health partnership. For example, equitable access to good quality health could be compromised should committees give undue priority to the status-raising potential of their programs. Macpherson comments 'the erection of hospital buildings often said as much about the ability of [sic] district to mobilise resources as it did about their commitment to the medicine practiced in the buildings' (1990:81). The misuse of social sanctions is another issue, raising concerns of whether village women are adopting the health teachings because they 'have' to, or because they understand their value to family health. Further, anecdotal reports indicate that sometimes the 'additional' costs associated with belonging to a committee (such as donations to building projects) could become so great that members either diverted family funds for these activities which they could ill afford, or simply opted out of committee activities altogether. Thomas's (1986) comment that these were probably the families most in need of regular health education is a serious concern. Finally, the desire of committees to have their own health centres severely influenced the distribution of the national pool of health expertise: it resulted in so many small health centres being built throughout the country that the government couldn't staff them. The government was driven to advise committees to consult with them before they built!

Against these, and other examples, is the truth that *komiti tumāma* were, and still are, the only access many rural families have to systematic health care and training. The committees sit firmly within their communities and are responsive to community needs. They represent
substantial social capital and an invaluable outreach tool for development programs. Overall, these health partnerships have been effective and at times inspiring.

The influence of restructuring measures on NGOs

NGOs have been influenced by the rapid social and economic changes taking place in the late twentieth century. Increased aspirations have influenced the amount of resources families have to devote to voluntary activities, while new recreational activities (such as television and organised sports) cut into the time people are willing to spend in community service.

Government restructuring measures aimed at ‘transparent, effective, equitable and accountable national systems’ are another factor influencing NGO capacity. Results from Samoa’s Household Income and Expenditure Study (UNDP 1998) show that a significant number of families are living below the basic poverty line. The effects of restructuring measures, such as the introduction of value-added goods and services tax and the expansion of a user pay system for basic services, have worked to increase the cost of living. At the same time the downsizing of the public sector has reduced employment opportunities and led to more intensive competition in business and in the informal sector. Concurrently government measures aimed at bringing NGOs into a national cohesive development framework have directly influenced NGO freedom of action and independence. While couched in terms of enhancing support for NGOs, these measures actually centralise development activity and challenge NGO autonomy and morale. What is more, these measures appear to favour the development of a small cadre of new ‘professional’ urban-based NGOs—that is, NGOs possessing the new, required knowledge of how to work the system, to the detriment of long-standing, more community-based NGOs, such as the komiti tumama. This trend implies a perception by government that traditional groups cannot deal with today’s more complex development issues and will not be able to fulfil the management and reporting responsibilities required of NGOs in the new governance partnerships. Government measures directly influencing NGOs include

- government–NGO partnerships. Consultation with government may change the role of NGOs from that of a ‘community watchdog’ and ‘commentator on government programs’ to one of compliance with government. The
former assertive position which NGOs held in the past may be silenced in this new relationship. As a consequence, the government’s development ‘vision’ may take precedence over local and community priorities.

- the creation of a Government Aid Coordinating Committee (GACC). The GACC scrutinizes all requests for project assistance and gives the official authorisation for donor funding. The GACC restrains NGOs from taking an independent approach to donor agencies.

- the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MWA) with its mandate of ‘unifying government and NGO programs into a cohesive national plan for women’ also impacts on NGOs. For example, the MWA has established a Women’s Advisory Committee (WAC) to guide its operation, which is comprised of government representatives and representatives of women’s NGOs selected by rotation. This arrangement enables the MWA to claim it is working in close consultation with NGOs, despite the fact that some NGOs refuse to work with the MWA.

The MWA and WAC present women’s issues to government, the GACC and the public. As the official ‘first stop’ (or screening process) for women’s programs, the MWA also awards programs to the NGOs they consider most appropriate to run them. Unfortunately, this approach has led to certain NGOs developing an exclusive ownership of specific issue areas, thereby reducing the access other NGOs working in that field have to the information, training or funding they need to run their programs. For example, all micro enterprise training and support now tends to go to the Women and Business Foundation, all support for domestic violence matters to the Mapusaga o Aiga NGO, and so forth.

It may be purely coincidental, but the NGOs selected in this way have been the relatively newer and urban based groups, none of which have strong or long-standing community networks. Government support for these groups implies a reaction against the perceived traditionalism of older, rural-based groups, such as the komiti tumama and, by implication, the selection of ‘institutional management capacity’ over ‘people power.’

Changing donor preferences are a third factor influencing NGOs. Donors today express less interest in small projects which, in their opinion, require ‘just as much paperwork as a big project’. New trends for donors include
• vigorous support for NGO umbrella groups. For example, in 1998 the Samoa Umbrella Group for NGOs (SUNGO) was established with substantial funding from the UNDPs’ Partners in Development program.

• donor funding for staff salaries. This challenges the heart of the NGO ethic and is contributing to the fragmentation of NGOs. These NGOs are no longer voluntary organisations, and their staff are paid. On the practical level, funded staff also gives these groups a huge administrative advantage over volunteer NGOs: they can buy specific administrative and technical skills and so theoretically should be running better quality programs than voluntary groups.

As a result of these and other measures, two distinct groups of NGOs now exist in Samoa: a group of what I will call ‘traditional’ NGOs (voluntary, unpaid, independent, and community based), and a group of ‘professional’ NGOs, whose staff and programs may be funded by donors, but which do not exhibit strong community networks. It is unclear whether this separation has been a deliberate or an unintended consequence of the government’s economic restructuring. That it is a consequence of the economic cutbacks is without doubt. However, this situation raises questions of whether and how restructuring measures can capture the best characteristics of both groups in a governance agenda.

**NGO consciousness**

There has been very little dialogue amongst NGOs or with governments and donors about how structural changes are influencing NGO ethics, autonomy and morale. The majority of NGOs have simply accepted these measures and complied with their dictates. The National Council of Women (NCW) stands apart as the only NGO to debate this issue and argue strongly against the incorporating nature of these measures, aimed at drawing NGOs into a governance agenda. The NCW has not aligned with the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and so does not sit on the WAC. Nor has the NCW joined SUNGO. Instead, this experienced group continues to guard its independence stoutly, stressing that as an NGO it must be outside government. In doing so, the NCW has remained true to its creed first iterated in the 1980s, when the NCW President declined the honour of being the national voice for women with the words that, although a unified women’s voice was important, such a move would
stifle the initiative and vibrancy of Samoa’s many women’s groups (Laulu Fetauimale‘imau Mataafa, pers. comm. 1983). The NCW’s decision ‘not to work with government but to work alongside government’ is a daring move by the organisation because there appears to be some truth in the opinion that only NGOs affiliated to SUNGO will get funding from the UNDP or from government.

Some awareness that structural changes may be having a negative effect on NGOs is slowly starting to emerge. Voluntary workers from two prominent NGOs recently commented

Joining SUNGO has lessened our effectiveness. We are a voluntary group. SUNGO has created another layer, which we have to negotiate through if we want funding....It’s far more competitive than before. It might be easier for the donors...but I think all they (SUNGO) are really doing is setting up an administration, which gives jobs to them (NGO leader, interview with author 1999).

X donor told us NGOs to apply for funds, because if we didn’t, the funds reverted to Government. So we did. Our NGO applied for x amount, and the donor looked over our project and agreed that we needed x amount to achieve our goals. Then the Aid Coordinating Committee looked at the proposal. They said, ‘you only need x...’. They cut the budget by two thirds and said we could try other avenues to get the remainder. What has that meant to our program? That means that instead of funding for the three-year program, I have funds for one year only, and then I need to scramble to try and get funds for the other years. It means we have had to change the whole program...Does this [incident] mean that GACC cut back on us NGOs [requests for funding] so that Government gets more funding? (NGO leader, interview with author 1999).

Health partnerships 1999

Government–women’s committee health partnerships are at a very fragile point. The Department of Health and the komiti tumamā still share a vision of good health. However, the DOH no longer regards women’s committees as equal partners in health education and appears to have developed a top down attitude to health care and education. A 1998 World Bank Report notes

...the refusal by the Department of Health to formally recognise the role of women’s committees in health promotion has led to strained relations between the Department of Health and the women’s committees in many communities. In early 1997 this was brought to
the forefront with many committees expressing unwillingness to provide preventive services since they reflect their roles were being increasingly marginalised, with increased stress on home based health care by Department of Health personnel. This has been resolved to some extent in most communities, and these committees are often seen to work along with Department of Health personnel in promoting village sanitation and health. Women’s committees are and have always been an integral part of health service delivery in Samoa. Recognising this, the DOH should make efforts to improve its relations with these committees and encourage their continued involvement in health promotion activities (World Bank 1998: Annex 3).

It is clear that there has been a failure to establish a set of agreed roles and operational procedures to suit these changing times. Like other government departments, the DOH has undergone considerable restructuring in recent times including the introduction of performance budgeting and a user pays policy, the upgrading of staff qualifications, increased specialisation, and privatisation (that is, the delegation of Family Planning, AIDS, and Diabetes programs to NGOs). These measures have brought about the centralisation of resources and increasing marginalisation of community groups and rural health centres. What is more, instead of the personal one-to-one relationship of district nurse and committee which characterised earlier partnerships, komiti tumamā are now expected to liaise with numerous health personnel, each of whom have their own expertise, timetable and agenda. Even with the best will in the world, such practice reduces the likelihood of effective consultation, let alone the development of strong people-based health partnerships.

The partners

The DOH program is also expanding into areas which women’s committees have always considered to be their responsibility. For example, the DOH now employs Public Health Inspectors who monitor environmental health, such as housing standards, clean water and sanitation. The komiti tumamā have always regarded this to be their duty, and the fact that ‘they [the health inspectors] are being paid for doing what we have always done for nothing’ has added insult to injury. This situation raises questions about ‘unpaid’ service and about what government should provide for communities and what communities should do for themselves.

The women’s committees have also undergone internal changes in recent years. These groups are not the thriving vibrant groups of past
years. For example, the committees’ increasingly limited access to funding has affected the range and standard of health services they can provide and in some cases, has forced them to increase the fees they charge for health care. This has led to a decline in committee membership, which again influences the economic viability of the committees’ operation. One study showed that 93 per cent of the 70 families in an ‘Upolu rural village belonged to the komiti tumama in 1989—only one family did not. By 1999, committee membership had dropped to 50 per cent of the families. Young mothers interviewed by the author said they saw little purpose in committee activities, they didn’t have the time to participate and they preferred to drive directly to the national hospital for what they perceived to be better health care (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1999). National data confirms a decline in attendance at health subcentres and health centres with an increase at the referral centres (WHO 1997:48). It also points out that only 40 per cent of the health facilities and subcentres in rural areas met the standard requirements of subcentres and health centre levels (ibid).

**What about service?**

It is clear that any decline in women’s committee services will be most keenly felt by families which do not have the means to access alternative health services. Data shows access to health care has become a key issue, particularly in rural areas today. For example, reported maternal mortality rates have remained low throughout 1988–95 (not exceeding 1 per 1,000 live births) however, ‘there are some indications for concern that there is a significant degree of under-reporting of maternal mortality in the country’ (WHO 1997:52). The same report goes on ‘an estimated 85–90 per cent of pregnant women nationwide are seen by a trained health worker at least once during their pregnancy, however, accurate data is not available from the rural areas’ (ibid). In another example, the percentage of deliveries attended by trained personnel has been estimated at 75–80 per cent (Department of Health 1993) and the average number of antenatal visits per pregnant women at all government health facilities in that period was 4.35 for the duration of the pregnancy (Department of Health 1994). This sounds reasonable until we take into account the fact that there is no data on the numbers of women not attending antenatal visits or why this is so. These gaps in health data for rural areas are alarming.
Concluding comments

Community based NGOs such as the women’s committees have proven their worth as partners in family, community and national development. The women’s committees have been an effective vehicle for the delivery of government health programs and have ensured that families in even the most remote areas have had systematic access to health care and training. Women’s committees have also been an invaluable training ground for women in leadership skills, decision making, lobbying, budgeting and ultimately in self-reliance. As the health needs of the community become more complex, the capacity of women’s committees to meet them have been weakened by a restructuring agenda which has brought impoverishment to many families while focusing on national, centralized, and large-scale programs. Government and donors alike have increasingly tended to channel resources to newer, urban-based and professional NGOs while neglecting the older, community-based and voluntary groups like the komiti tumamā. In the case of the komiti tumamā this neglect is critical as they are the only access many rural families have to systematic health care and training. There is little national consciousness of the effects of these measures on NGO ethics or on the implications this holds for the Samoan custom of tautua.

This case study raises the following questions: can restructuring measures become an opportunity to capture the best characteristics of both NGOs and government in a governance agenda, and how do we integrate community resourcefulness and drive into the increasingly more complex development scenario? For while it may be possible to increase NGO administrative and technical capacity through restructuring programs it is much harder to simulate the community-related or ‘people’ factors which make an NGO ‘work’.

Samoa’s health partnerships are at a transition point. Should the DOH assume greater control of health services or should it reactivate and support the community based systems? In this chapter I have argued that as one of the most experienced and effective NGOs in the history of development in Samoa the women’s committees should monitor community networks for health education, training and health care, but in a form which is appropriate to the more complex health needs of the twenty-first century. The women’s committees are still a viable and comprehensive network for the delivery of health programs. It is unrealistic to expect traditional NGOs, such as the women’s committees,
to operate solely by means of alofa today. Funds are needed. However, with some reorganisation, and appropriate support systems, women’s committees and other community based NGOs can be re-energised.

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Are the *Matai* ‘out of time’? tradition and democracy: contemporary ambiguities and historical transformations of the concept of chief

Serge Tcherkézoff

**Historicising the present**

Legal and informal literature as well as discourse about governance in Samoa, centres around the role of the *matai*, a term usually translated as chief or title-holder. Be it in the Constitution of Samoa, the Register of Land and Titles, village *fono* discussions, or in Western studies of Samoan social structure, the notion of *matai* is presented as though it were a permanent and central feature of Samoan culture and society. In spite of current debates about the changing role of the *matai* in the contemporary parliamentary electoral system, the notion and institution of the *fa’amatāi* are usually not considered as an historical process.¹

In order to understand the contemporary programs of the government and opposition involved in Samoan national debates, and the institutions defining the State of Samoa, in particular its parliament and the changes in the mode of parliamentary elections, we need to historicise the present. We must admit that the notion of *matai* is in transition, as it has been for at least 100 years. Before discussing the contemporary roles of the *matai*, one has to uncover and analyse the emergence of the *matai* in recent Samoan history.²

Three factors indicate that the notion of *matai* became prominent through specific Samoan historical contingencies, dating from the nineteenth century.
Observation of contemporary political debates show that both those in favour and against the idea that matai alone should be the leaders of the nation, consider the matai to be an internally egalitarian class of people defined as holders of a family title, who, as such represent a basic group. At the national political level, the hierarchy between titles has lost importance, while at the village and district level it retains its values and authority. The difference between an ali’i and a tulafale title does not play a role in the constitutional rights of a matai to be a parliamentary candidate. In addition, people who are not from the same district as a parliamentarian are often uncertain of the type of title held by the latter. This has been the case since the 1980s, when the number and variety of political candidates increased.

Linguistic comparisons of chiefly systems in Polynesia have shown that nearly everywhere, cognates of the word ali’i designate or designated the chiefs or the main chiefs. Nowhere, except in Samoa, do we find that the word matai designates chiefs.

Historical analysis of ethnographic works and archives dealing with the Samoan islands shows that the chiefly system as it exists today emerged in the early twentieth century. All chiefs were henceforth called matai of which there were two types according to the title they held: ali’i or tulafale. Literature of the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, however, gives a totally different presentation: the matai were the heads of sub-groups belonging to an extended family headed by an ali’i with a number of tulafale around him.

I will develop the first point then discuss the historical transformations that led to the emergence of the notion of matai as we understand it today.

Three contemporary paradoxes in the Samoan political ideology

Considering the present historically is useful for explaining three Samoan contemporary ideological and institutional equations which, in general, Western observers of Samoan politics find paradoxical.

- The fa’amatai and democracy. In parliamentary elections both pro-matai suffrage and pro-universal suffrage supporters claim that their respective program is aimed at fulfilling the requirements of democracy.
- A semi-universal suffrage system. The 1990 referendum which questioned the limitation of the electoral franchise to
matai did not propose full universal suffrage, but only the application of universal suffrage to voters, while the right to be a candidate remained limited to matai.4

- The tama 'aiga, matai and untitled people. Although not written anywhere in the Constitution, the system which currently appears to a majority of Samoans to be coherent with 'Samoan culture' is a three-layered system. The position of Head of State5 should be filled only by those few matai who, by virtue of their title, are said to be tama 'aiga. Members of Parliament (MPs) are, and should always be, matai. Finally, although this has only been the case since 1990, all adults may vote.6

These seeming paradoxes, which are not in any way typical of traditional Polynesian chiefly institutions, are not the result of mere acculturation to Western values of democracy. They are the result of Samoan historical transformation. The latter has led to the merging of what used to be the egalitarian notion of family or household head with the old notion of sacred chief, into a new notion of title-holder, or matai. Ironically, this was understood by Westerners to be a non-egalitarian position. When referring to the Samoan matai, United Nations representatives in the 1950s used the Western notion of chief or noble. For the Samoans, however, it is egalitarian and democratic as the matai is a freely chosen representative of the family group.

Paradox 1 Matai suffrage and democracy

This paradox is related to the recent history of Samoa. The Western Samoan Constitution of 1962 was prepared by a national convention held during the 1950s, and was completed by the 1963 Electoral Act. It established a parliament composed by representatives of various districts of the country. A clear majority of the delegates to the convention requested that eligibility to parliament and representation of a district be restricted to matai.7 In 1990 a referendum won by a small margin changed the definition of voters, opening the franchise to every citizen over 21 years old, while maintaining the limitation placed on candidacy.

A lively debate preceded and followed the referendum. Both supporters of the status quo and those who supported the new system, claimed that their goal was to preserve the future of the matai system, and enhance democracy.8

The claim that the pro-matai suffrage is democratic stresses the democratic aspects of the selection process of the matai within his or her
family. In each ‘aiga, a matai is chosen by the whole family assembly, based on criteria which deal with personality and not on an automatic rule of inheritance or primogeniture. The person chosen embodies the name or title of the founding ancestor and becomes the trustee of the land owned by this ancestor and used by the family. In addition, each family assembly can decide at any time to reclaim the title given in custody to the matai, if he or she appears to have behaved in a way incompatible with the dignity of that title. This is a strong means of controlling matai, and by extension a good way of controlling MPs. Should an MP forget their status as a representative, their political career may come to an abrupt end. In contrast, MPs elected by universal suffrage have a much more abstract relation to the people, as it is built on political platforms alone, which are always projected into an indefinite future. Thus, the pro-matai suffrage supporters are able to claim that their preferred system, the 1962 system, was democratic and guaranteed even greater democracy than the 1990 system.

The notion of matai which is discussed in such terms, is a recent emergence. To say that matai are democratically chosen representatives, is just one aspect of the system. The other, complementary aspect is that all matai, precisely because they are considered to be democratically chosen representatives of a family, are comparable to one another, and constitute an internally egalitarian class of representatives as would parliamentarians in a Western context. This democratic choice is made through consensus and not through any voting procedure. In consensus, influential people naturally have unequal weight compared to younger or newer people, and this can appear undemocratic. But many Samoans consider that the voting process is disadvantageous because it reduces each person’s relative experience, and respect gained through experience, to a statistical one person—one vote system. Many also consider that the voting system introduces a winner/loser dichotomy which creates division. With consensus, there is no clearly designated losing side (Tcherkézoff 1997:326, 363 ff.). This explains why consensus is still the only procedure admitted in all family and village assemblies, the voting system being present only in the context of modern politics of the Malo or government.

The idea that matai are all similar and comparable in status at the national level is the outcome of recent history. This is substantiated by reports of the first outside observers of Samoans chiefs, in which the latter are known only as ali’i, and also by observers of other Polynesian chiefs reporting on ariki, eiki, and so on.
Paradox 2 The referendum of 1990 and democracy

There has never been a clear majority at any time in favour of full universal suffrage. This has caused some surprise outside Samoa and allowed Western political scientists, such as Stephanie Lawson, to denounce tradition as a political pretext used by the élite to maintain its hold on power. This is apparent in analyses of the 1990 referendum: faced with popular demand for greater participation in politics, the government would have decided to widen the franchise but, in the name of fa'amatai would have been unwilling to modify the status of candidates thus allowing chiefs only to sit in parliament and form the cabinet.

In her book Tradition versus Democracy in the South Pacific: Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa, Stephanie Lawson finds strong similarities in the ways the élite of these three countries use and call on tradition. She claims tradition is used as an ‘ideological arsenal which has been used to counter the development of more democratic norms of political conduct and organisation—norms that threaten the status of many élites in the region’ (Lawson 1996:5). Lawson explains, that in the name of tradition, Fijian leaders established an anti-democratic Constitution in 1990. Similarly, Tongan leaders, the royal family and the 33 noble families, have a majority vote in parliament even though they constitute a small minority in the country. Under the guise of tradition, more than half of the seats are reserved for these leaders. According to Lawson, although the 1990 referendum in Samoa could be seen as a move toward greater democracy, it was really a move planned by the chiefs to preserve the chiefly system and to insulate the chiefly system from political manoeuvering at the voting level, while maintaining power at the candidacy level (Lawson 1996:118). It was a democratic façade, and in the end served to better preserve chiefly status and the status quo.

Lawson develops these structural and ahistorical explanations of the maintenance of power, with a circumstantial approach (Lawson 1996:150). She quotes Le Tagaloa Pita, an opposition leader according to whom the Human Rights Political Party (HRPP) widened the franchise because it was afraid of losing the next election. By doing so the HRPP knew it could count on women and young men of the urban and peri-urban areas, who were receptive to a modernist, development-oriented discourse, and that this new and numerous adjunct of votes would bring victory. As less than 10 per cent of matai are female, matai-only suffrage de facto left out the women of the country.12

In sociological analysis, structural and micro-circumstantial reasons are insufficient. Structural arguments are too general to provide
specificity. Lawson’s analysis, shared by many political scientists, is challenged on two levels: if tradition is so effective, it must be more than just a cover; and, if it applies to all political systems of the world, what then is specific about Samoa?

Even if Samoan members of Cabinet who were in charge in 1989–90 were to have stated publicly that they did not care about democracy or about the role of women in politics, or that the idea of the referendum just popped to mind one night as a political device to win a particular election, it would not explain why 20,000 people, out of 39,000 voters, voted in favour of the referendum. A program where every adult votes and only matai are candidates, appeared coherent enough to 20,000 adults with their idea of Samoa and fa’a Samoa. We still have to understand why those who voted no because they favoured the matai-only system, and those who voted yes in favour of the semi-universal suffrage system, shared the same convictions that a parliament composed of matai only was democratic. Out of these 39,000 voters, only a small minority could be said to have had a direct personal link to different ministries or to have had a direct interest in any kind of plot devised to maintain the HRPP cabinet of 1989.¹³

For the majority of people, including those who voted eagerly for the 1990 change, candidates for parliament are within a democratic system because, as matai, they have proven their capacity to be a representative (sui). Often forgotten or ignored is that this Samoan ideology of representation and the concept of a unique type of traditional representative, the matai, are products of nineteenth century history. Lawson forgets that, whereas chiefs in Tonga represent only 33 noble families in a country of 100,000 inhabitants, Samoan chiefs who have the right to run for election, number between 15,000 and 25,000 out of 160,000 inhabitants. In Samoa, family heads have become chiefs and there is not a single family who does not have a chief. To be a chief is to represent the family in front of other families. No family is left out of the system.¹⁴

Lawson also has a limited and naive view of democracy. She states that democracy is a question of less restriction and greater liberalisation of voting (Lawson 1996:117–18), as if the nature and the process of representation itself were not problematic. In fact, the discussion on democracy should first ask what the best school for learning to become a representative is. Could it be the ‘aiga system? If so, then candidates to parliament should be matai only. Or is it the individualism of public life symbolized by the one person, one vote ideology? In that case, any citizen
should be allowed to run. These were the arguments exchanged within Samoa around 1990. This debate is quite different from that of Lawson's book, *Tradition versus Democracy*, which compares conservative indigenous traditions manipulated by the élite and a type of Western progress. It is more a question of whether the future of Samoan democracy should continue to be rooted first and foremost at the village level, where *matai* as family heads learn the job of representation within the village council, or at a national level.

In neglecting the village level, there is concern that society will evolve rapidly into a dichotomy of town versus countryside. In fact, the 1990 electoral changes were accompanied by the legal reinforcement of the powers of village councils. This legal change was, however, insufficient to prevent the rapid dichotomisation between urban/peri-urban Samoa, north-west 'Upolu, and the rest of the country. Similarly divided were salaried workers in an urban environment, and plantation workers; and people who increasingly believe that land should be privatised to facilitate development schemes, and for smaller or nuclear family to have their own place, and those who are deeply attached to the 'aiga land system (Tcherkézoff 1998b). This is the real economic and social debate about the future of Samoan democracy.

Lawson tends to represent chiefs as an essentially conservative and oligarchic élite and assumes universal suffrage is always a guarantee of progress towards equality. A detailed observation of the evolution in the last decade in Samoa reveals a very different picture. The distance between the rich and the poor is rapidly increasing together with the gap between town and village people. Lawson seems to ignore that, contrary to the Tongan situation, Samoan high traditional chiefs are often not involved in the international business sector.15

The notion of chief which emerged in Samoa is quite different from that of Fiji or Tonga. It has evolved from embodying the sacred value of the traditional *ali'i pa'ia*, controlling a pyramid of households within a large 'aiga, to embody the social value of being a representative, that is, a *matai* or head of family. This transformation is central to the contemporary debate on *fa'amatai* and democracy in Samoa. We must turn to the history of this change for explanations of the contemporary ideologies expressed by Samoans, rather than imagining, with Lawson, a false and Euro-centric history of struggle between the chiefs and the people.

This change has occurred on a national level. Within village ceremonial life, many aspects of the sacredness of the family head as the embodiment of the founding ancestor are still at work. The respect for
hierarchy, which is built on the longevity of the genealogy of each family name and its relation to the founding ancestor within the village or district history, still determines a large part of social life in the village. It also plays a role in relations between matai at the district level. But from a national political point of view, this hierarchy has been partly replaced by two other considerations: the sameness of all matai as representatives; and the new three-tiered stratification of tama 'āiga, other matai and non-matai. This last consideration brings us to the third paradox.

Paradox 3 A three-layered ideology

The Constitution states that the Head of State is chosen by parliament for a five-year term. But in 1962 a special amendment awarded the position for life to two matai who had held pre-eminent positions in the local administration under New Zealand rule: Malietoa Tanumafili II and Tupua Tamasese Meaole. Both titles are tama ‘āiga. Tupua Tamasese Meaole has passed away. Malietoa Tanumafili II is still Head of State and has held the position continuously since 1962. His successor will be appointed according to the terms of the Constitution.

Under the 1962 Constitution, the Head of State is to be chosen by parliament among candidates whose only obligation is to be qualified to be elected as a Member of Parliament. But as seems obvious to many Samoans through their shared ideology, the Head of State should hold a tama ‘āiga title.

The tama ‘āiga families, who are closely related to each other, have played a central role in Samoa’s interaction with foreigners during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is not exactly known when the traditional designation tama a ‘āiga, meaning one who is an offspring related to many families, became a classification of titles known as tama (a) ‘āiga, and were restricted to very few individuals. It is plausible that the change occurred sometime during early European contact. Europeans looked for kings and chiefs because they facilitated control of native peoples. During the last third of the nineteenth century, consular reports already spoke of royal titles when referring to titles known today as tama ‘āiga. European settlers and their consuls were eager to find a king or a ruler of the western part of the archipelago with whom they could deal in a clear, that is, Western manner. At this time, there were always at least two, three, four or more, different factions (itu), and the Europeans called them royal, while desperately trying from 1870 to have one of them designated as sole king. In fact, kingship oscillated mainly between Malietoa, Tupua and Mata’afa in the mid to late nineteenth century.
Throughout this period, settlers and commercial companies were backed by consuls, who in turn, were supported by war ships that entered Samoan waters. This situation pertained to the German colonial rule of 1899–1914, the New Zealand administration, and through to independence, with the decision to have two Heads of State, Malietoa and Tupua.

None of the contemporary institutional and ideological debates taking place in Samoa today would exist if contemporary chiefs were still the ali‘i pa‘ia described by early observers. The notion of matai is certainly not European and was not introduced by Europeans. It is a truly Samoan notion but it became pre-eminent in the nineteenth century as a result of the interaction between Samoans and foreigners. Matai went from a meaning restricted to craftsman, master craftsman and/or household head, to the meaning of chief as we know it today. The institution of the matai as the head of a household, entitled as such to sit in the village council, is fully Samoan and is attested to in some of the earliest sources. But until the end of the nineteenth century, these matai had lower status than most ali‘i, in particular when the latter were heads of a large extended family or of a whole district. Between 1870 and 1930 the notion of title-holder became firmly established. This was particularly so after the Germans created the Land and Titles Commission which was maintained by the New Zealand Administration.

An historical deconstruction and reconstruction

The quasi-absence of the term matai in the literature of the voyagers and missionaries until the end of the nineteenth century indicates that the chiefs the Europeans observed were ali‘i and that they were accompanied by tulafale. Were it not for Samoan dictionaries written by missionaries (for example, Pratt) and W.T. Pritchard’s definition of the master tattooist as matai, we would not even be able to guess that the term matai existed at the time (Pratt 1911; Pritchard 1866). But the term matai did exist in the 1840s–50s. It was used to describe craft specialists, like the tattooist, and family heads. Thus, there were ali‘i, tulafale and matai. The absence of the contemporary notion of matai as an class encompassing all the chiefs in early writings, tells us that the status system of the time was extremely different from the one we have know since the 1930s.

Family heads did meet in councils at the village level, but political life, at least in its dealings with foreigners, was in the hands of the ali‘i and their orators. Most likely, the notion of title as we know it today was
not a feature of the *matai*-ness, but only of the *ali‘i* and *tulafale* system. Heads of families did carry the name of the founding ancestor of that segment and were indeed inducted in a ceremony, but this had little significance beyond the village level. It mattered only for defining participation in village *fono*. There was no notion of title-holder uniting all title-holders in a common role throughout Samoa, as is the case today with *matai*. This is simply because there was no central government to which all chiefs could have a common relation.

The distinction between *ali‘i* and *tulafale* weakened while the usage of the word *matai* expanded, in particular toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. This concomitance suggests a causal link. What is certain is that there was a general levelling of the hierarchy of titles. This levelling may have led to the use of a unitary category of title-holders. At the same time, a kind of stratification began to replace old hierarchies in Western Samoa. This was accompanied by the emergence of a new opposition between a central power and local polities.

The levelling process took place over almost 100 years and may be divided into three phases. The first phase of levelling occurred with the arrival of European ships, which became intensive after 1825. Ship captains sought out a local chief with whom to barter, but did not attempt to gain a clear view of the whole hierarchy of the district or of the island. The effect of this is summarised in a remark made by Captain J. Worth after his visit in 1846

[There are] five or six chiefs supposed to possess more influence than all the others. For instance, Upolu is divided into three districts, each district having a principal chief...These great chiefs occasionally meet...each having his advisers called Tualafele [sic], who are respectable chiefs...The great bulk of the people are of various grades, but far the greater part consider themselves chiefs; indeed the great difficulty is not in finding out who is a chief, but who is not one! (Worth 1852:543–4).

The missionaries also had a levelling effect, as Meleisea aptly put it (1992:21–2). As the sacredness of the main *ali‘i*, condensed in the concepts of *pa‘ia* and *mana*, was extended to the missionaries and to their God, these notions became gradually rooted in the new God alone. The first missionaries mentioned the existence of *ali‘i pa‘ia*, while today the word *pa‘ia* applies only to God and to the Bible (*Tama Pa‘ia*, the Sacrosanct Father, and *Tusi Pa‘ia*, the Sacrosanct Writing). Similarly, today the notion of *mana* applies only to God’s actions. Another crucial factor that is usually
omitted, is that missionaries acquired, perhaps unknowingly, the supernatural powers of the sister’s side of the high ali‘i titles. Malietoa Vainuupo, the high ali‘i who received the first missionaries in 1830, in addition to giving them the right of the Susuga address, made them the quasi-sisters of each village, by bestowing on them the ceremonial address of Faʻafeagaiga Taulagi (Aiono 1996:36).

We can appreciate how from then on, as Melesea (1992:21–2) states, chiefly power became more of a ‘secular political authority’. This change had a major secondary effect: the distinction between ali‘i and tulafale became more ceremonial than actual.

These changes led to chiefs and orators, ali‘i and tulafale, being considered members of a single institution, that of title-holder, and to an increased use of the term matai. An indication of the lessening differences between ali‘i and tulafale is that the special term which applied to their relationship in the nineteenth century, feagaiga (indicating a fundamentally asymmetric dualism—one side is a whole of which another is a part) (Tcherkezoff 1993), is seldom used in that way today.

The second phase of levelling occurred with the Steinberger episode in the 1870s. The US adventurer and representative, tried to set up a Samoan government with elections: a kind of rehearsal before outright colonisation (see Gilson 1970:293–331). A bicameral system was established which, although theoretically based on status differentiation, was influential in bringing all selected ali‘i and tulafale together. This weakened the principle of the ali‘i/tulafale distinction. It also created a level of high chiefs and orators selected to represent the country in front of the Apia European community. This new level was differentiated from the rest of the chiefs and orators. The bicameral system, known as ta‘imua and faipule, was maintained and expanded upon until the end of the century. Thus, at the same time that the new system weakened the ali‘i/tulafale distinction, it created a new stratification between chiefs as national leaders and local chiefs.

The third phase of levelling occurred under German Administration. In 1901 Solf, the first Governor of German Samoa (1900–09), created the position of main chief of all Samoa as a kind of adviser to him, and called it Le Ali‘i Sili (Meleisea 1992:30). This was part of Solf’s strategy to find different ways of reducing the hierarchy between titles. Solf and Schultz named the German Emperor Tupu, that is, the chief above all other chiefs. In Samoan history the word tupu designated the few men or women who, temporarily, could capture for themselves the main titles of the archipelago, or at least of the western part. Meleisea states that Solf made
it quite clear that the Ali‘i Sili was not the Tupu and that only the Kaiser was the Tupu. Moreover, as an enforcement of that levelling effect, he ordered that, at the ceremony of investiture of the Ali‘i Sili, the fine mats would be distributed in a new way: they were to be equally apportioned to the chiefs representing each district (Meleisea 1992:33). This was a novelty, and a clever move to make all title-holders appear equal in contrast to the Kaiser who was represented by Governor Solf and by Imperial Justice Schultz. Meleisea also emphasises Solf’s determination to undermine the power of the group of orators, tūmua and pule who were the main recipients of fine mats. The German authorities’ elevation of the Kaiser in Samoa was reminiscent of that of Jehovah by the missionaries: both created a distinction which served to level the local hierarchy.

On the other hand, it is significant that Solf named his Samoan adviser Ali‘i Sili rather than Matai Sili. It is an indication that the term matai was not yet an all-inclusive category of title-holders.

Solf and Schultz took a further step towards controlling the title system in 1903 by contributing to the establishment of the Land and Titles Commission ostensibly to impose peace. Conflicts over titles were, from then on, to be solved by imperial justice and not in the villages. The move was also initiated to supervise title and land transfers. In 1903 the Germans saw themselves as entering a long period of imperialism in the Pacific, and their plans for Samoa were to expand copra plantations. Control of land and of land sales to individual foreign settlers was of utmost importance to them (Gilson 1970; Meleisea 1987a). This commission quickly became a State Registration office for titles, leading to the institutionalisation of the notion of title-holder.

While the old hierarchies, based on the notion of pa‘ia, were gradually being replaced by a new idea of sameness, of being a matai, a new stratification linked to the role of the tama ‘āiga emerged. The new stratification occurred at the national level and created three layers: the tama ‘āiga, the matai and the untitled people. It contrasted with the previous system which was something of a continuum extending from the Creator of the world, Tagaloa, to the most recent newborn child. The advent of this stratification was also linked to the emergence of new opposition between a national or central authority, and village authority.

The three-tiered stratification and the dualism between the national level and the village level are not absolutely rigid. Between the two categories of national and local titles, there are titles that are widely known even though they are not tama ‘āiga. They play a national role
through oratory debates in parliament, high positions in ministries and in the private sector. Thus, a certain idea of a global hierarchy of titles still exists in the minds of everyone, even if its content fluctuates according to different peoples’ views. The opposition between national and local polities, however, is real and is increasingly becoming a part of daily life.

The rules of the mālō, or government, have become the only ones which are recognised as valid nationally, while the faʻamatai retains all its traditional power at the village level. It is significant that the same mālō which democratised the franchise in 1990, also introduced the Village Fono Act giving village councils of matai greater legal powers and quasi autonomy in certain areas. Although the mālō is made up of parliamentarians who are matai and is not limited to tamaʻaiga or even to prominent titles, it does consider itself a body set apart from the entity called faʻamatai. It is a government representing the nation and it considers that the faʻamatai should exercise its prerogatives at the village level only.26

The current Samoan political context may then be summarised in three homologous configurations: the state system, which includes the government, MPs and the people in general; the mālō and faʻamatai, which includes the government, the matai, and the people; and Samoan democracy where tamaʻaiga are candidates for the position of Head of State, title-holders are parliamentary candidates, and untitled people vote.

**Conclusion**

The main thesis of this chapter is that the gradual emergence of the matai as a comprehensive class of title-holders and heads of family is directly linked to the levelling process that affected the chiefly system. In this process, the previous notion of aliʻi as sacred chiefs representing ancient gods and the ancestors, was replaced by the notion of a person chosen by the group. They were chosen because their personal skills made them representative. In this sense, the connotations of being skilled and being the first, have their origin in the old meanings of the word matai, as can be seen from a pan-Polynesian comparison of the word (see Tcherkézoff 2000).

This new concept of matai, as a family head equal to other family heads, led to them being considered the natural representative in a modern electoral context. Since the creation of the Register of matai for electoral purposes, the distinction between aliʻi and tulafale is no longer
relevant. The irrelevance of the *ali'i/tulafale* opposition in terms of suffrage, and in contemporary debates on democracy and *matai* suffrage versus universal suffrage, may indicate that Samoa has entered the last stage of this long-term process of Samoan history. This period may be labelled the levelling of the chiefly system, at the supra-village level. The latter is a major factor of Samoan governance and one that must be taken into account in any discussion about the future of the political system in Samoa.

It would be a mistake to ignore the historical aspect of the evolution of the Samoan chiefs. The vocabulary of past and present Europeans visiting Samoa, whether captains of whaling ships, missionaries, consuls, colonial administrators, United Nations delegates, or contemporary Western political scientists, has constantly centred on chiefs, nobility and the élite. Samoan chiefs are not ‘out of time’, nor should they be understood as such.

**Notes**

1. My previous publications on the contemporary Samoan political system (1997:part 2, 1998a) are also a-historical. This is because I felt it was important to first deconstruct Western biases which are used in contemporary Western analyses of the Samoan political system: ‘chiefs’ as aristocracy, as nobility, as an anti-democratic class, the false debates on ‘tradition versus democracy’, etc. I tried to show that the *matai* as family heads do not constitute a social class *per se*, for the simple reason that all families have a *matai*. I also tried to deconstruct the notions of ‘aristocracy’ and democracy and the over-simplified view that the contemporary political evolution in Samoa is the reflection of an opposition between a progressive move towards democracy and a conservative reaction to maintain an aristocratic tradition. Having dealt with these Western ethnocentric biases, I think it is useful to go a step further and look at what happened in the past to make *matai* what they are today.

2. If we put aside Samoan and Western legal, political and anthropological literature and studies by Western historians (Gilson 1970; Davidson 1967) where the *matai* is always presented ‘out of time’, and look at the works of Samoan historians, we find that Malama Meleisea (1987a, 1992, 1995) has stressed with great pertinence the ‘secularisation’ of the *matai* between 1850 and 1950. I will go one step further: the notion of *matai* as an encompassing class is really a linguistic and and a political innovation of the nineteenth century.
3 For a discussion of linguistic factors and ethnographic literature, see Tcherkézoff 2000.

4 In the discussion which follows, I leave aside the question of the two individual seats which are filled, by universal suffrage, by electors registered on the individual roll (members of mixed families who choose not to be part of the matai system). The small number of these electors—3 per cent of all adults, 1.5 per cent of the population, 4 per cent of parliamentary seats—allows us to leave them out of the present discussion. But from a historical point of view, the existence of this individual roll, from the nineteenth century Municipality of Apia to the inclusion of individual voters' roll in the 1962 Constitution, is extremely important. The recognition by Samoans of the existence of and the logic of the universal suffrage is thus not recent—and any paternalistic Western discourse on the idea that Samoans still need to learn about democracy is not only insulting but totally irrelevant.

5 And the position of member of the Council of Deputies (i.e., a Council of three deputies who are in charge of the State in case of absence or incapacity of the Head of State).

6 This view seems to be shared by many Samoans once the discussion is placed within the contemporary post-1990 reality. A different picture emerges if the discussion focuses on an ideal system (which is understood also as the most coherent system): the two 'ideals' are on one side a full Western type parliamentary set-up and on the other a matai system without any voting institution, going back entirely to the practice of consensus (Tcherkézoff 1998a: last section). But only a minority would be ready in practice to vote for either of these ideal systems.

7 For reasons too complex to deal with here, linked partly to the presence of Western 'advisers' in the convention and to United Nations pressure, it was decided that Electoral Acts would define the franchise. The Constitution, nonetheless, outlined the difference between an individual voters' roll (for the minority who wished to be outside the matai system) and the territorial constituencies roll. As other sections of the Constitution dealing with land tenure in general link land (and thus, implicitly, territorial constituencies) to matai titles, a legal uncertainty was created (and intensely debated in the 1990s): is the modification of the franchise a constitutional change (which then requires a two-thirds vote of parliament) or only the modification of an Act (which then requires a simple majority)? The government of 1990 naturally adopted the second view since it wanted the change to be adopted but it did not at the time have a two-thirds majority in parliament. The referendum was intended to give legitimacy to the change. It achieved this formally, since the 'yes' won. But discussions on moral legitimacy continued, because of the figures: more than 60,000 people were over 21 years
old (total population: 160,000) and thus eligible to vote. Only 39,328 voted. Registration was required, along with a photograph for the voter registration card; this meant travel to a place where a picture could be taken thus implying a financial cost. Out of those who voted, 19,392 voted yes, 17,464 no, and 2,472 votes were declared null and void.

8 See Tcherkezoff 1997:376, 1988a. The main argument of the pro-universal suffrage advocates was that matai-only suffrage had led candidates to create great numbers of new matai titles (including landless titles) just as a way of increasing the number of voters. The number of matai in the country jumped from 15,000 to 25,000 within a few years in the 1980s. This, so the argument went, was jeopardising the whole system. If every young man could easily become a matai, the hierarchy matai/non-matai which is the key of the authority system at the village level would no longer be efficient.

9 Gender is not a requirement: women can be matai and there are many examples. Nonetheless they represent less than 10 per cent of matai and the implicit maleness of the role is clear. It is not related to 'maleness' in the sense of tamaloa-ness against 'femaleness' in the sense of fafine-ness, but to the brother role of 'making the power' under the guidance of the 'sister' role (the sister having a more direct immaterial link with the founding ancestors: tapuaiga). This is directly related to the concept of feagaiga (Aiono 1986, 1996:36; Schoeffel 1978, 1979, 1995; Tcherkezoff 1992b, 1993, 1999, 2000: chap. 7 and sq.).

10 Samoans are 'children of the land', as are the Hawaiians and other Polynesians. The only owner of 'customary' land is the ancestor(s). Only 4 per cent of the country is under private ownership. When a Samoan talks of 'his' land, he uses the kind of possessive particle which generally applies to persons and things related to the possessor in a way in which the possessor is not at the origin of the possession (i.e., 'o-class' particles, used for titles, land, houses, kinship relations, parts of the body) (Tcherkezoff 1992a, 1998b, 2000: chap. 3).

11 The question of consensus/vote is itself a part of the greater mało/fa'amatai complex relation and of the even greater socio-cosmological configuration which differentiates on one side the logic of 'victory/defeat' mało/vaivai and on the other side the hierarchy of status positions through 'respect' fa'aaloalo linked to genealogies, titles, etc. This dichotomy is expressed in the fact that persons 'own' their victory/defeat but are owned by their ancestors, titles, genealogies, land, etc. (and here again two different class of possessive particles express linguistically this major ideological difference '-a-class/-o-class').

12 Of course this raises another discussion. If one considers that the matai role is wholly and only vested in the person who is the matai,
one may conclude that women are kept outside of political decision making. Ensuring the participation of women then would imply a rule making women 50 per cent of matai or completely abandoning a system where the franchise is limited to matai. But if one considers that no family decision is taken by the matai, but that it is taken through a partnership of the brother putting into action what the sister(s) think(s) and say(s) as the Feagaiga of the family, then the role of women in politics through the fa'amatai is quite active. Again, another argument is that it may be too late to think along those lines. The feagaiga cooperative relationship between tamatane and tamafafine has already given way, within many families, to rivalries and to demands for ‘taking turns’ to hold the title (with this other problem that groups asking to have their turn are not women versus men but tamafafine vs. tamatane and when tamafafine, i.e., descendants of the sister’s side, demand their turn, it is still the male members of the tamafafine who come to the fore as candidates for the title).

I do not dispute the validity of the comments of the Samoan opposition leaders quoted by Lawson (1996:150). I question Lawson’s attempt to take comments which are being traded at the level of the struggle between political parties—however true or not these arguments are at that level—and to place them at an explanatory level for sociological analysis.

At the end of the 1980s, the Agricultural Census counted 15,000 households (11,500 with plantation lands). This is the number of matai, discounting those created for purely electoral purposes and who are not in charge of land (when including the latter, the total figure of matai jumps up to 21,000 in 1986 and 24,500 in 1988; a number of them are not registered on the national Land and Titles Register). At the end of the 1980s, the population was approximately 155,000–160,000 (or 200,000 if we include overseas-based Samoans). In 1972, there were 8,610 registered matai (total population 144,000). Even if we stick to the lower figure of 10,000 matai who are proper heads of family (the notion of family ‘aiga implying land) for the recent period (population 160,000 with more than half being under 20 years old), it leaves us with one matai for 16 inhabitants, one matai for 7 adults (or one in 10 if we include the overseas Samoans). Those figures do not reflect any oligarchic élite. In the mid-nineteenth century, the proportion was not much different. What was dramatically different at the time, was that the main decision makers, and certainly those who interacted with foreigners, were the ‘District Chiefs’ (as the missionaries called them). In the island of Tutuila, they numbered only about 4 out of a total of 250 matai and a population of 2,000 (oldest village census, handwritten report by Thomas Powell dated 12 July 1854, London Missionary Society archives, South Seas Letters, Incoming letters, Box 25, Folder 7).
Lawson’s rather provocative argument promoting Western political ideals (see her 1998 ‘Introduction’ and pp. 117–18) is her own, quite understandable, reaction, to a tendency within Western literature to ‘celebrate the renaissance of indigenous culture’, as Lawson says, and, with this ‘cultural relativism’, to ignore massive domination and exploitation exerted by local elites on local people. But the ethically useful answer to her salubrious reaction is certainly not to call for a more rapid Westernisation of non-Western systems, because this Westernisation only brings more of, or another kind of, inequality. There is a need to look for a new synthesis. The real problem is the democratic control of national economies. In Samoa, this has very little to do with the matai-only or all-adults suffrage. It has to do with the division between the families and their matai, who belong to the business sector and those, and their matai, who don’t. The real problem is ‘Tradition versus Development’. I am certainly not calling for a zero-development scheme, as do some Westerners who are nostalgic of the 1960s, a call all too easy to make from within the comfort of Western cities and offices. I am calling for a search for ways where Samoan villagers and not only politicians—whether they are matai or not is irrelevant—would have control over the content and the benefits of development programs.

In those years, the distinction between the two parts of the archipelago was different from today. On one side stood the three tiny islands of the Manua group, under the most sacred title of the whole archipelago, Tui Manua. Because of very poor wharf facilities and the exiguity of these islands, foreign settlers were not interested in them. On the other side were all the big islands, all to the west of the Manua group: Tutuila, ‘Upolu, Savai’i, and a few small ones located near the coast of the three large ones. During the second half of the nineteenth century, Tutuila continued to be much more involved with the history of the other western islands than with its tiny eastern neighbour. It is only because of US interest in the beautiful bay of Pago Pago in Tutuila that the colonial division between the US and Germany cut the archipelago into two with Tutuila becoming part of an entity which included the Manua group.

The traditional expression ‘aiga ma tama, tama ma ‘aiga (families and their children, children and their families) has two meanings, due to the ambiguity of the word ‘aiga. In a very general sense, each extended family ‘aiga preserves its name (title) with one child in each generation carrying on the name. A chief is the child of his family, the child of the founding ancestor. But the word ‘aiga applies also to an inferior level and to superior level. The inferior one is that of the household and is not important to our present discussion. The superior one refers to the whole village, groups of villages or even to the district or group of districts where one title
became prominent, through alliances or through in wars which ended with success. The missionaries' understanding of the Samoan political system was pyramidal: at the head was the Chief of the District, also known as High Chief, Main Chief or Paramount Chief, followed by plain chiefs and executives (or rulers). The first consuls, as they tried to inform their respective governments (British, German, United States), used the term 'royal titles' for all or some of those paramount chiefs.

18 But the role of the latter are uncertain for the first part of that century. In fact the role of the matai was barely noticed by European and other visitors. I have yet to find a Samoan mythological text (among those recorded in the nineteenth century by Pratt, Powell, etc.) where one of the heroes of the story is designated as a matai. The words ali'í of course, and occasionally tulafale, appear in those myths, but as far as I know, the term matai doesn't.

19 'Secular' may be a little too strong a qualification. The sacredness of the principle of embodying the founding ancestor, through the induction ceremony which bestows on the newly chosen ali'i or tulafale the name of this founding ancestor (with such a strength that this very individual is no longer called by his previous personal name, even by his close relatives) is something which is still acted upon and seen today for all matai at the village level. Of course, that sacredness I am stressing is a principle shared by all chiefs and orators: a principle which precisely today defines the status of being a matai. It is a principle shared by all matai and therefore, a part of the levelling process.

20 Schoeffel (1995) notes this in her study of the historical transformations of that concept. The concept has retained only part of its pre-contact application to the relationship between descendants of a sister vs. descendants of her brother and has mainly retained its nineteenth century Christian application (God/humans, pastor/village) and its nineteenth-twentieth century acquired meaning of 'contract' in business.

21 It is of utmost importance to understand that, as with the term sili (see below), it was no longer a sacred hierarchy: ta'imua refers only to the 'vanguard', i.e. the first line of an armed group (the word was certainly chosen by the mixed group of Samoans and Europeans who conducted much of 'Apia politics' in the last thirty years of the century).

22 The word sili, as far as I can judge, always gives the idea of primus inter pares. It is a very different idea from what is conveyed by the notion of pa'ia which, on the contrary, radically sets apart the entity so defined. The change from pa'ia to sili in the manner of marking the hierarchical distance was certainly already in the shared ideology. It was a result of the disappearance of the use of the notion pa'ia within the chiefly system. But Solf and Schultz, who
had a strong interest in Samoan concepts in general, were certainly quite happy to be able to use the notion of *sili*.

23 At the village level (and sometimes at the district level), however, the principle of hierarchy continues to operate through the different genealogies and formal sets of greetings referring to the history of the village, etc. This hierarchy and the subtle and flexible ranking between families within the village continue to play an important role in decisions taken in the village *fono* be they about appropriate behaviour, building or repairing a church or school, imposing fines, etc.

24 This expression itself, much used by Europeans of the twentieth century, is very revealing. From a positive definition of the *aumaga* as being the ‘kava chewers’ for the ‘sacred circle’ *alofi sa* formed by the chiefs and orators *ali’i ma faipule*, the *aumaga* took on a negative definition of not being part of ‘titled’ men. It reveals how the various title-holders became viewed as a single stratum: the ‘titled’ people versus the ‘untitled’ people.

25 In the progression of this opposition, the old notion of ‘district’ as a result of temporary alliance, gradually disappeared. This disappearance was itself reinforced by the creation of smaller districts for electoral purposes by the various administrations, from the last quarter of the nineteenth century (the *Ta’imua* and *Faipule* bi-cameral system) until today’s parliamentary districts.

26 *Malō* means both government and state. It was the name given to the victorious warring party; the defeated party was called *Vaivāi* (which generally means weak).

27 I refer to the title and content of Thomas (1989).
Civil and political liberty
the case of Samoa
Asofou So’o

The three essential conditions of a democratic system of government are
meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and
organised groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions
of government power, at regular intervals and excluding the use of
force; a highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of
leaders and policies, at least through regular and fair elections, such
that no major (adult) social groups are excluded; and a level of civil and
political liberties—freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom
to form and join organisations—sufficient to ensure the integrity of
political competition and participation (Diamond et al. 1988:xvi).

For a healthy democracy, it is vitally important that civil and political
liberties do not remain hidden in the law books but are practiced in
everyday life. In order for citizens to make informed decisions about the
affairs of their state and elect politicians whom they judge to best
represent their interests, it is imperative that information circulates freely.
Free speech and expression through fora such as rallies and the media
promotes vibrant democracy. To make their concerns known to their
political representatives, citizens must also have the right to form
associations and unions to promote their collective views. Through these
democratic means, the state is made to respond to its citizens’ interests
and concerns. This enables citizens to check the power of (or abuse of it
by) the state and people in positions of power generally.

Dissemination and fabrication of information for public consumption
are two different things. Dissemination implies the publicising of correct
information. Interpretation and opinions should be distinguished from
facts. Provided the facts are unambiguously stated, citizens have the
freedom to agree or disagree with the interpretation and opinions of the person(s) from whom the information originated. Fabrication of information, on the other hand, is stating untrue information in the hope of misleading the public.

It is the moral and ethical responsibility of those publishing information to distinguish fact from opinion. It is the responsibility of public servants to provide information—only then may the democratic goal of free flow of information be achieved.

The constitution of the Independent State of Samoa provides for civil and political liberties, including the right to

- freedom of speech and expression
- assemble peacefully and without arms
- form associations or unions
- move freely throughout...Samoa and to reside in any part thereof (Constitution of the Independent State of Western Samoa, Part II, 13.1[a-d]).

In Samoa, the constitution also allows important aspects of the matai system to continue. Holders of matai titles fill 47 out of 49 seats in parliament. Even though the constitution does not explicitly provide for the legal recognition of village governments per se, the provision under the Electoral Act (1963, 1991) that only matai can be the candidates for parliament’s 47 seats indirectly legalises the existence of village governments. Even though a matai title is rendered legal when it is officially registered in the Land and Titles Court, it is the village government that legitimates it. The Land and Titles Court only registers a new title after the traditional title-conferring ceremony (at which the village government plays the most important role) has taken place. It is the traditional prerogative of a village to accept (or reject) a new title-holder from being a member of its council of matai—the highest traditional authority in the village. The village council may deny the new titleholder entry to the village council by refusing to participate in the title-conferring ceremony.

The matai procedures and values are cultural yardsticks by which Samoans judge what is right and what is wrong, what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Traditional institutions include village governments (including the matai council, faletua ma tausi [wives of ali’i and tulafale], aualuma [village girls], taulele’a [untitled men] and fafine laiti [wives of untitled men]), district governments and the national institutions of Tūmua¹ and Pule² (the collective name by which the 11 traditional districts of Samoa and their associated structures and
Civil and political liberties in the democratic sense are foreign concepts in Samoa's cultural context, particularly in village governments. Decisions made in the village council and its various sub-organisations follow established procedures. Once decisions are made at those fora, all involved are expected to abide by them. A decision of the village council overrides the decisions of sub-organisations. Freedom to form associations, freedom of expression (press and speech) are considered un-Samoan and unacceptable if used as an attempt to influence the decisions of village authorities.

The fact that Samoan customs and traditions are also incorporated into the national constitution implies a possible conflict between the practice of civil and political liberties at the national political level, and customs and traditions as espoused in various cultural institutions, including village governments. Politicians find it difficult to reconcile the cultural values they have learned in village governments (and through their upbringing in general) with the civil and political liberties required in a democracy. Alternatively, democratic principles may be deliberately ignored and cultural values invoked to excuse this failing. In these circumstances, civil and political liberty is likely to suffer.

Freedom of expression

Two examples should help gauge the extent to which this aspect of individual rights has been exercised and the kinds of responses elicited in exercising it. I will comment on the examples after exposing them.

**Vice Chancellor vs The SamoaObserver**

The Vice Chancellor (VC) of the National University of Samoa sued the local newspaper *The SamoaObserver* for ST$250,000, claiming he had been defamed in an article which appeared on 22 September 1989. The hearing took place between 27 August and September 1991. Chief Justice Ryan
found that

The Plaintiff has been defamed in two aspects:

(a) as to his administrative and management abilities and
(b) as to his honesty and integrity.

I find that the defence of justification has been made out in the first instance as to the Plaintiff’s administrative and management abilities but that it has not been made out insofar as his honesty and integrity are concerned. In respect of that second defamation I fix damages in the sum of $WS20,000 and costs. The amount claimed by the Plaintiff was in my view grossly excessive and would have been so even if the defence of justification on the first ground had not been made out.4

Chief Justice Ryan explained that the plaintiff had been defamed not only by the article at issue, but also six subsequent articles.5 In explaining his decision, Chief Justice Ryan said that the

Plaintiff’s counsel suggests that when looked at overall the only interpretation that can be placed on such a series of publications is the Defendants are biased and prejudiced against the Plaintiff and that at all times they have endeavoured to place before the public a one-sided and totally prejudiced view of the plaintiff’s involvement with the University as its principal administrator.

...The Plaintiff’s view is that when the whole article is looked at...the only interpretation which can be placed on the Article is that he [the Vice Chancellor] is a dishonest man and a thief—that he has ‘dipped into’ University funds, that he has cheated on expenses, that he has attempted to manipulate university finances to his own ends, that he has been involved in questionable activities.

The Defendant Malifa in his evidence conceded that he did not approach the Plaintiff to discuss with him the allegations which some of the students had made to him.

It hardly needs to be re-stated but that the media, and in particular the print media, whose images induce beyond the spoken word, must exercise its power in a balanced and impartial manner. Here there was no reasonable effort made by the Defendant to provide the Plaintiff with an opportunity to answer the allegations made. There was no attempt at impartiality or fairness and the Plaintiff was portrayed in a manner which encouraged denigration by the many readers of the paper.

Mr Malifa in his evidence said he ‘tried to get in touch with someone’—hardly a strenuous effort for the champion of the freedom of the Press, which he then admitted to being.

I must say that I was in no doubt when I read the article but that the Plaintiff was involved in some financial skulduggery, that he was misappropriating University funds and that he was a dishonest person. He has satisfied me in the witness box that he was defamed.
...I take from the evidence as a whole on this topic that the allegation that: the administration dipped into the Canadian grant of $40,000 was a blatant lie on the part of the Defendants...The witness denied telling the Defendant Malifa that this had occurred and in my view the Defendants falsely and maliciously fabricated this allegation.6

Expulsion from parliament of Leota Leulu'a'ili'i Itu'au Ale

Speaking in parliament on 1 March 1990, former speaker of parliament (1976–79) Leota Itu'au Ale accused the incumbent prime minister of 'unlawfully taking a refrigerator from the government house at Malae-o-matagofie at Matāutu', among other items (The Samoa Observer 9 March 1990). The speaker ordered Leota to substantiate his allegations. Five days later, when Leota had failed to provide any evidence to support his allegations, parliament passed another resolution giving him an extra 24 hours to come up with evidence. Leota's evidence included letters from the Financial Secretary (the Head of the Treasury Department) and the Manager of the Development Bank of Western Samoa. The letter from the Financial Secretary to Leota's lawyers, who inquired into advances made to the prime minister by government, stated that 'the Public Monies Act does not authorize any such disclosure' (The Samoa Observer 9 March 1990). The letter from the manager of the Development Bank 'said that banking principles do not allow him to provide any information on a client without the written consent of the client' (The Samoa Observer 9 March 1990). Eventually, Leota rose in parliament and read from a series of papers, alleging improprieties in the management of government property and regulations. The speaker judged that he could not accept the papers submitted by Leota as they did not address the 'issue at hand, which was to substantiate the allegation that the prime minister had unlawfully taken a refrigerator, spoons and other property from the government residence at Pilot Point' (The Samoa Observer 9 March 1990). Immediately thereafter, the Member of Parliament whose daughter Leota claimed had told him of the theft of the refrigerator moved that Leota be suspended from parliament for 12 months without pay and without the privileges normally accorded to Members of Parliament. The speaker ruled that Leota could not be suspended for 12 months because only 10 months remained before the end of the current parliamentary term. The original motion was then amended so that Leota was suspended for the rest of the current parliament. Before the motion was passed, the prime minister denied the original allegations as well as those that were made when Leota read out his list of new allegations.
Following his suspension from parliament, Leota said that 'if we [the Opposition] become the government we will call a Commission of Inquiry' to investigate the government’s alleged mismanagement of public money (The Samoa Observer 14 March 1990). Leota thought that the Assembly’s Privileges Committee would look into his allegations but ‘it is obvious that this would not be so’. Moreover, Leota claimed, an unfounded allegation was made in parliament by the same Member who moved the motion to have him suspended, which resulted in the Nauru government withdrawing all its investments from Western Samoa. Leota claimed that the allegation had cost the country a substantial amount of money, but there had been no attempt to seek substantiation (The Samoa Observer 14 March 1990). Commenting on Leota’s suspension, the leader of the opposition said that it was ‘a sad day for democracy [in this country] and a sad day for the truth’ (The Samoa Observer 9 March 1990). The leader of the opposition was particularly unhappy that a number of similar allegations had been made in parliament by government members. Referring to the minister who had made allegations against the Nauru government, the leader of the opposition said ‘We had asked the minister to provide the substantiation but this was never done...When they want to silence opposition all they do is band together and there’s nothing anybody can do about it’ (quoted in The Samoa Observer 9 March 1990).

**Freedom of the press**

The cases cited above are important in three respects. First, they set precedents. Second, they occurred in the context of an operative political party system. Third, indirectly if not directly, they influenced the passing in early 1993 of the Newspapers and Printers Act 1992/1993, and the Defamation Act 1992/1993. Clause 10 of the Newspapers and Printers Act allows a plaintiff to discover the

\[\text{name of the printer or publisher of any newspaper or of any matter relating to the printing and publishing thereof, including any correspondences, written materials or other sources of information whatsoever, in order to enable him more effectually to bring or continue an action for damages...} \]


Clause 10 requires journalists and editors to reveal their sources of information. A breach of this clause can result in three months jail term and a fine of up to ST$5,000 (Clause 18, Newspapers and Printers Act 1992/1993).
In terms of the Defamation Act, journalists' main concern revolves around Clauses 6, 7 and 8 (*The Samoa Observer* 17 February 1993). Clause 6 makes it an offence to publish defamatory statements made in court about someone who was not a party to the court proceedings. Clause 7 deals with matter printed about a member of a group when the member is unidentified. Any member of that group who feels 'aggrieved' by the report and has 'reasonable grounds' for believing others 'may suppose that the words are intended to apply to him' can demand a written 'disclaimer' saying the published words did not refer to him. Clause 8 requires 'a person who has published words alleged to be defamatory of another person' to 'make an offer of amends under this section if he claims that the words were published by him innocently in relation to the other person' (Clause 8[1], Defamation Act 1992/1993). 'If the offer is not accepted by the party aggrieved', then the publisher has to defend his innocence in court (Clause 8[1.b], Defamation Act 1992/1993).

Understandably, the passing of the two laws drew criticism from the media and some sections of the public. The Pacific Journalists' Association and PNG Journalists Association called on the Western Samoan government to repeal the Newspapers and Printers Act, arguing that '[p]rotection of sources by journalists and editors is a fundamental aspect of the freedom of the media and our profession to inform the public' (cited in *The Samoa Observer* 17 February 1993). The publisher of *The Samoa Observer* argued that '[a]ny attempt to tamper with freedom of expression... is a serious threat to democracy. Forcing newspapers to disclose their sources is another way of silencing critics of the government' (cited in *Islands Business* March 1993:58). Fata Fa'alogot Pito, life member of the Pacific Islands News Association and former publisher of *Samoa Times*, said that

…it comes as no surprise that a government with skeletons in its cupboards would wish to lock the doors, bolt the windows and gag the servants...a statement is libellous or slanderous because of its contents not because of its source. How soon will it be before the police is given the authority to bug telephones and intercept mail? How long will it be before lawyers and doctors lose the protection of the confidentiality of their information? (cited in *Islands Business* March 1993:58).

Le Tagaloa Pita, current Member of Parliament and publisher of the local newspaper *The South Sea*, whose wife had been one of the witnesses for the defendants in the *VC vs The Samoa Observer* case said that, in view of the successful defamation lawsuit by the Vice Chancellor against
The Samoa Observer, it was absolutely clear that ‘the rights of those who felt wronged were already protected’ (cited in Pacific Islands Monthly April 1993:28). Misa Telefoni, lawyer and a minister in the Human Rights Protection Party-led government (1991–95), however, defended Clause 10 of the Newspapers and Printers Act, arguing that it did not remove individual rights. According to him, the clause is aimed at people who use aliases and write misleading information (cited in Islands Business March 1993:58). The prime minister at the time defended the same law, saying

I believe that by introducing this Act, the standards of the press in Western Samoa will be enhanced, and that the public and the international community can look forward to a higher standard of reporting in terms of accuracy, relevancy and fairness (Sāvali 18 February 1993).

He continued elsewhere, saying ‘Where is the right we protect and not protect? Let the hammer fall on the nail...let not just the publisher carry the full burden, but also the source’ (quoted in Islands Business March 1993:58).

Commenting on Pacific island leaders in general, the editor of the Pacific Islands Monthly (April 1993:4) wrote a telling piece.

Perhaps a reason for the sensitivity of our leaders is steeped in cultural traditions of the islands. Traditional leaders of the Pacific—be they the chiefs, nobles or matai—have been accustomed to unquestioning loyalty and respect from subjects. Their positions and actions are undisputed...

But as the Pacific media grows away from being largely government-owned or government-controlled entities and assumes its new responsibility as the watchdog of the nation, the governments are perhaps retaliating in an attempt to check the trend. But the clock cannot be turned back. The public has begun to expect the media’s new role—of being the voice of the people in demanding greater accountability from the governments.

In explaining the reasons behind the enactment of the Newspapers and Printers Act, the former prime minister went on to say that

Western Samoa is a developing nation in terms of Western civilisation. In this development, it has become inevitable that new ideologies, influences, rights and responsibilities have needed to be assimilated into its society. It is true to say that Samoa must retain its own culture and identity. That is why a responsible Western Samoan government must not hasten to import Western ideas and beliefs automatically no matter how attractive they may be (quoted in Sāvali 18 February 1993).
The debate over freedom of the media and freedom of expression was well summed up by Ioritana Leʻuga in a tactful article in *The Samoa Observer* (17 February 1993).

Personally I would feel at ease as a free Samoan if this piece of legislation (Newspapers and Printers Act, Clause 10) is retracted. It’s like a gun. In the right hands it’s safe. In the wrong hands it’s lethal. I have no serious problems with it in Tofilau’s hands [but] will the hands after him be guaranteed? No siree, better recall it before it haunts their creators to their dying day...
If retracted, everyone from government to opposition, to newspapermen to the public must exercise this freedom responsibly. When things get choppy, let’s accept it as democracy reacting to safeguard the citizens from the power of the state.

**Freedom to form and join organisations**

The freedom to form and join organisations is well protected under the constitution’s provisions on Fundamental Rights (Article 13[b-c], Constitution of the Independent State of Western Samoa). An example of how one organisation has been dealt with by the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP)’s government indicates how effective the justice system has been in safeguarding this provision of the constitution. This organisation called itself *Tūmua ma Pule* (*Tūmua* and *Pule*).† Subdivision of these districts throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries resulted in 39 electoral constituencies which were incorporated into the country’s constitution (1962). Some of the constituencies have more than one representative because of their population size. Before the introduction of Western political ideas into Samoa in the early nineteenth century, Samoa’s affairs were administered and controlled within the *Tūmua* and *Pule* sociopolitical framework. *Tūmua* and *Pule* is an example of an organisation operating in a constitutionally established democratic state.

**Tūmua and Pule protest movement**

The origin of the *Tūmua* and *Pule* demonstration can be traced to the introduction of the 10 per cent value-added goods and services tax (VAGST) on 1 January 1994. A misunderstanding between the government and the Price Control Board resulted in the enforcement of the new price order on the day the VAGST became effective (*The Samoa Observer* 1 March 1994). The combined effects of these developments
were a 40 per cent increase in the cost of living (The Samoa Observer 11 February 1994). Public reaction gave rise to, or more accurately 'reactivated', the Tūmua and Pule demonstration—a traditional sociopolitical structure. Although the movement was initiated by the Tūmua political centres on 'Upolu, the organisers of the demonstration quickly met with and obtained the support of the six Pule political centres on Savai‘i as well as the traditional political district of Āiga-i-le-tai. As one spokesman of the movement pointed out, 'the six Pule didn’t have any sense of hesitation, [they had] been waiting for Tūmua to make the move' (The Samoa Observer 11 February 1994). In an article which explained the developments which led to the formation of the Tūmua and Pule demonstration, The Samoa Observer referred to Tūmua and Pule as the 'traditional arbitrators over national crises' (The Samoa Observer 11 February 1994). Another article in the same edition called upon Tūmua and Pule to save the country from the current crisis.

In a press release on 24 February 1994, Tūmua and Pule stated that the two objectives of its planned demonstration were abolition of the VAGST and a change of government (The Samoa Observer 1 March 1994). In a speech on national television on 27 February 1994, the prime minister responded to the second objective by stipulating the various constitutional ways in which a government could be changed. He reiterated the point that Tūmua and Pule could not force an immediate change of government with their planned protest march (The Samoa Observer 1 March 1994). An editorial in The Samoa Observer had alluded to the possibility that the Head of State

will most likely ‘decline a state of emergency exists’ if the protest march against the high cost of living goes ahead on 2 March as planned. He is empowered under the Constitution to do this. But only if he is satisfied ‘acting in his discretion after consultation with Cabinet’ that the ‘economic life of Western Samoa’ is threatened by an ‘internal disturbance’ (The Samoa Observer 23 February 1994).

The protest march went ahead as planned on 2 March 1994 and close to 20,000 people participated. About half the participants were matai (The Samoa Observer 3 March 1994). The demonstrators marched for about five miles, starting in Vaimoso and heading towards the main government building in the centre of Apia, to deliver their petition to the Prime Minister and his cabinet. Tūmua and Pule designated the Leader of the Opposition, Tui Ātua Tupua Tamasese Efi, to be their spokesman and officially deliver their petition to the government. Tofilau responded that, in an effort to solve the matter, the Head of State had agreed to an
Executive Council meeting on 4 March. Furthermore, the government was planning a further reduction in prices of items on the price order (*The Samoa Observer* 3 March 1994). Insisting that the VAGST be abolished, Tūmua and Pule refused to disband until that objective was realised, and commenced a two week camp in front of the government building. Responding to the prime minister’s reply to their petition Tupua said, ‘If you cannot see what is happening, then you must be blind. And if you cannot hear the people’s moaning, then you must be deaf’ (*The Samoa Observer* 3 March 1994).

In an announcement on National Radio 2AP, the prime minister said that, following a decision of the executive meeting on 4 March, the VAGST would remain unchanged. Instead, duties on all basic commodities would be reduced. The details would be officially announced in parliament when it met on 15 March (*The Samoa Observer* 6 March 1994). With the government prepared to compromise, resolution of the demonstrators’ demands seemed imminent. Tūmua and Pule leadership then sent a second delegation to the Head of State asking him to hold a referendum to ascertain the public’s views on how the cost of living was affecting them (*The Samoa Observer* 9 March 1994). When parliament convened on 15 March 1994, the Minister of Finance, in his 1993–94 budget, announced the 32 basic commodities on which tax would be reduced. The reduction ranged from total abolition of tax on some goods, to a 50 per cent reduction on others (*The Samoa Observer* 16 March 1994). Upon announcement of the tax reductions, the demonstrators, who had stayed on the government premises since 2 March, decided to disband. However, Tūmua and Pule leadership decided to keep up the pressure to have the VAGST abolished on all goods.

Another Tūmua and Pule delegation was sent to the Head of State in August 1994 asking him to abolish the VAGST and to acknowledge the Chief Auditor’s report, in which, among other things, the Chief Auditor ‘gave detailed instances of wide-scale corruption and implicated a number of ministers and government officials’ (*The Samoa Observer* 13 January 1995).11 The Head of State asked the delegation to give him a written petition and an indication of the number of people who supported it (*The Samoa Observer* 13 September 1994). A signed petition was presented on 11 March 1995 by a Tūmua and Pule delegation immediately after another public march in which about 30,000 people participated. A total of 133,354 people were claimed to have signed the petition. Of these, 122,954 were Samoans residing in Western Samoa while the other 10,400 were Samoans residing in Wellington, New Zealand. People in the latter
group ‘were concerned that the remittances they were sending over for their families’ upkeep here were being subject to the 10 per cent tax when the funds had already been taxed in New Zealand’ (The Samoa Observer 10 March 1995). Upon receiving the petition, the Head of State told the delegation that the Executive Council would meet to discuss it (The Samoa Observer 12 March 1995). On 11 March the government appointed a special 14-member committee with terms of reference which included investigating of the validity of the signatures in the petition (The Samoa Observer 12 May, 6 June 1995). Its report, which was presented to the government in mid-August 1995, found that the Tūmua and Pule petition was invalid. The report claimed that the petition was illegal, because all petitions are supposed to be presented to parliament. Of the 12 matai who signed the petition, one had not officially registered his title with the Land and Titles Court. Of the alleged signatures in the petition, 122,179 had not personally signed their names. Furthermore, the VAGST and the chief auditor’s report had all been debated and passed by parliament (Sāvali 15 September 1995; The Samoa Observer 27 September 1995).

Tūmua and Pule had a victory on one front however. The Samoa Observer (24 June 1994) noted that the Police Department was probing whether there were seditious intentions behind the Tūmua and Pule national protest on 2 March 1994. The government pressed ahead with sedition charges against the president of Tūmua and Pule, Fa’amatuainu Tala Māilei, and one of its executive members, To’alepai T. Si’ueva, despite persistent pressure from the local and international media and Amnesty International to have the charges dropped (The Samoa Observer 15 March, 28 June 1995). Fa’amatuainu was charged under the Criminal Act on charges of speaking seditious words and two charges of publishing seditious libel. To’alepai was charged with two counts of speaking seditious words and one of publishing seditious libel. The charges originated from events leading up to the protest march on 2 March 1994. In court, Magistrate Lussick dismissed all the seven charges ‘when the prosecution failed to produce any evidence’ (The Samoa Observer 30 June 1995). The magistrate’s decision contrasted with the police commissioner’s earlier remarks, that ‘the charges were valid and would not be withdrawn by the police’ (The Samoa Observer 31 March 1995). Following this court decision, the two men planned to sue the government for ST$1,000,000 ‘for the unconstitutional way in which we were both charged for sedition’ (The Samoa Observer 4 August 1995). Reflecting upon
the sedition case in an article in *The Samoa Observer* (30 June 1995), Tupua, Leader of the opposition Samoa National Development Party (SNDP), said that

[i]t was an attempt to portray the Tūmua and Pule movement as a real threat to law and order. The objective was to discourage the local council of churches and those who are supporting or sympathetic from a more public demonstration of support for the Tūmua and Pule movement. Additionally it was intended to distract attention from the acute economic problems and corruption raised in the Auditor’s report. The tight government control on TV and radio, combined with the fact that the constituency is relatively uninformed, ensure impact and effectiveness of the message, ie. that the Tūmua and Pule movement is a threat to law and order.

From a democratic perspective, important political gains were made in the Tūmua and Pule demonstrations and the resulting sedition charges. One of them was well depicted in an editorial in *The Samoa Observer* (28 June 1995) on the day the sedition charges were heard in court.

For this hearing will set a standard by which future court cases of this kind will be judged against. It will serve as a powerful indicator to the nation of the amount of freedom we can really expect to have in the future.

The sedition charges were the ultimate test of the provisions for individual rights in the constitution. The Tūmua and Pule legal victory was particularly significant given the political situation where one political party had such a large majority in parliament that its power and political influence seemed unlimited. The justice system has become the last resort in containing this power within a political system that co-exists with an indigenous sociopolitical system which places much more emphasis on traditional loyalty.

It appears that the events which led eventually to the *VC vs The Samoa Observer* defamation case mentioned above had been indirectly, if not directly, affected by political developments. The defamatory articles against the Vice Chancellor had been prompted by people who were directly and indirectly affected by the manner in which the Vice Chancellor had administered the National University of Samoa. The Vice Chancellor’s administrative strategies were, in turn, influenced by the political tussle between the outgoing Coalition government and the incoming HRPP government. The new Professor of Samoan Language and Culture (whose job was terminated by the Vice Chancellor in late
1989, but later reinstated following a court injunction) and the Minister of Education (who was also the Chancellor of the University and chairman of its Council, and under whose chairmanship the appointment was made in 1988) were two of the 12 HRPP Members of Parliament who defected and formed the Coalition government in 1985. The Coalition lost the general elections in 1988. The Vice Chancellor's original appointment was made in 1984. At the time the Coalition government's Minister of Education was holding the same portfolio in the HRPP government. He was therefore directly responsible for the Vice Chancellor's original appointment.

The publicity generated by these developments was another milestone in educating the voting public and creating an awareness of the political importance of government policies. The two demonstrations in February 1965 and mid-1981 were staged by wage and salary earners. In 1994, this section of the public was only 13 per cent of the national population. Tūmua and Pule was a 'national' protest movement, because everyone was affected by the VAGST. Ironically, the Public Service Association (PSA) did not join the protest as an organisation, although its members were not prevented from joining as individuals. This may be in part because the introduction of the VAGST was accompanied by a substantial reduction in income taxes. Some 19,000 were exempted from income tax because their salaries were below ST$100 a week (The Samoa Observer 9 June 1995). In spite of the impact of the Tūmua and Pule marches and although other factors influenced the results of the 1996 elections, I would argue that, by and large, title, family, village, personality and other traditional affiliations rather than policies were still the main criteria by which the voting public selected their political leaders. This view is born out from the fact that the HRPP government still won the most seats in the 1996 elections despite the massive amount of publicity generated by the Tūmua and Pule marches.¹³

Civil and political liberties, and customs and traditions

The general traditional attitude to political rights has been described by the editor of the Pacific Islands Monthly (April 1993:4) quoted above. Although similar rights are recognised in some indigenous sociopolitical structures (such as the right to be consulted on certain issues and to participate in decision-making processes), they are, by and large, strictly controlled. Not surprisingly, the constitution has not recognised village governments per se, nor has it recognised Tūmua and Pule. These
institutions collectively governed Samoa before the arrival of European cultures. The exclusion of these institutions from the constitution thus undermines them in the present democratic framework. The Village Fono Act 1989 failed to give village governments all the powers they previously had in relation to customs and traditions, because recognition of these would contradict a number of individual-rights provisions in the constitution. Fifty-six per cent of voters who participated in the 1990 plebiscite responded negatively to the second question about whether or not the constitution should provide for a second house of parliament. As a second house would be representative of the 11 traditional political districts, among other possible members, the negative response to that question was another (and probably the final) blow to Tumua and Pule's traditional authority and rights.

The issue of village councils deciding which candidate all village members should vote for is still a problem. For example, as in the 1991 general elections (So'o 1993), the Sāvaia village council ruled that in the 1996 general election all village members were to vote for a particular candidate in their constituency. The government has not yet found a solution to this problem, even though, by right, any village practising this campaign strategy has breached the Undue Influence provision (Article 98, Electoral Act 1963). Perhaps all that is needed is to enforce this legislation. This could also be a problem, however, given village councils' resistance to state interference in their traditional roles.

Conclusion

The cases of the Vice Chancellor vs The Samoa Observer and the expulsion of Leota Itu’au from parliament illustrate freedom of expression at work, or at least attempts at free expression—in the case of Leota, he never stood a chance. However, in both cases the information expressed was not substantiated. The editor of The Samoa Observer ‘tried to get in touch with someone’ at the National University of Samoa—‘hardly a strenuous effort for the champion of the freedom of the Press.’ Leota Itu’au tried to get information to substantiate his claim but was unsuccessful because of regulations governing the release of information by the Financial Secretary and the manager of the Development Bank. Thus the truth or otherwise of Leota’s allegation will never be known. If Leota’s allegations were true, his expulsion from parliament was unjust. Given that the freedom of speech and expression is a concept which aims at limiting the actions of those in positions of power, Leota’s attempt was a
democratic failure. On the other hand, if Leota was indeed fabricating information, then his expulsion was a lesson not to mislead the public. Likewise, the Observer’s defamatory allegation against the Vice Chancellor was vindicated.

In the case of the Vice Chancellor vs The Samoa Observer, the courts had to decide the truth. The cost of these lawsuits though can be a real burden to ordinary citizens who might be falsely accused in the media. The government policy allowing public funds to be used by cabinet ministers to pay for lawsuits against the media is interesting. Whilst this policy is understandable given the costs of such lawsuits, it puts cabinet ministers in a privileged position vis-à-vis the general public. While it is hard for cabinet ministers to pay for lawsuits, it is nearly impossible for non-wage and salary earners. It is one thing to check the power of the state through the media and it is quite another to check the power of the media against publishing misleading information. Either way, the ordinary citizens are likely to be the losers. The brighter side, however, is the existence of mechanisms to ensure the maintenance of democracy. Democratic societies have to live with the costs of lawsuits. Not until the media undertake their democratic role responsibly will the power of the state be checked at minimum financial cost, better still for free.

The protest marches by the traditional institutions of Tūmua and Pule within the framework of the legal system provide interesting discussion. The unstated view of the organisation that they alone have the ultimate power on Samoan soil, implying that they could bypass parliament and change the legally elected government of the day, did not transpire. In the end they protested like any other organisation in a democratic state. That they succeeded in publicising their views in this way was an illustration of a healthy democracy at work. Police attempts to discredit the organisation and the tactic of threatening lawsuits against the movement’s leaders was unsuccessful. Whether or not Tūmua and Pule was successful in attracting immediate government response to their concerns is another matter. It is also difficult to know whether those who supported Tūmua and Pule did so because of their personal dissatisfaction with the government of the day, or because of their kinship affiliation to the leaders of the movement.

Freedom of expression and freedom of the media exist, but remain unprotected by the courts. Freedom to form and join organisations allowed the Tūmua and Pule movement to publicise their views. However, village governments could still pose a problem as long as the practice of punishing villagers who vote for candidates the village council does not
support continues. Furthermore, the practice of withholding voters’ identification cards until election day used by some candidates and their campaign committees to induce voters to vote for certain candidates (as was common in 1991 (see also So’o 1993)) will remain a problem unless those affected are prepared to take their complaints to the court.15 The constitutional provisions safeguarding civil and political liberties are working satisfactorily as long as issues relating to undemocratic tendencies end up in the court. Legal provision is one thing; actual practice in everyday life is quite another.

Notes

1 Tumua refers to the four political districts—Ā’ana, Tuamāsaga, Ātua and Va’aofonoti—and their respective capital centres on ‘Upolu.

2 Pule refers to the six political districts and their respective capital centres on Savai’i. The districts are Fa’asālele’aga, Gāgā’emauga, Gāgaifomauga, Vaisigano, Palauli and Satupa’itea. When mentioned together, Tumua and Pule also implies the 11th district of ‘Āiga-i-le-tai.

3 The actual dates of the hearing were 27, 29–30 August and 2–5 September 1991 (Judgement of Chief Justice Ryan in Tau’ili’ili Uili (Plaintiff) vs Porotesano Malifa and Ieti Lima (Defendants), 4 October 1991.

4 Judgement of Chief Justice Ryan in Tau’ili’ili Uili (Plaintiff) vs Porotesano Malifa and Ieti Lima (Defendants), 4 October 1991.


7 The Human Rights Protection Party was established in 1979. Its leader, Tofilau Ēti Alesana, was prime minister from 1983–85 and from 1988 till his resignation due to ill-health in 1998. The party is now led by Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Maliegaoi.

8 In the latter stages of the demonstrations, the movement called itself Tumua ma Pule ma ‘Āiga (Tumua and Pule and Āiga).

9 These included a vote during the general elections, a vote in parliament of no-confidence against the government, the resignation of the prime minister or his absence from the country without having first consulted the Head of State.

10 The village on the western outskirts of Apia which was the headquarters of the 1926 Mau against the New Zealand Administration.
11 A government-appointed commission of inquiry, which was set up ‘to look into allegations in the report to allow those implicated the chance to defend themselves’, ‘downplayed the report and exonerated most of those implicated in it’ (Observer 15 July 1994, 13 January 1995). Substantial sections of the chief auditor’s report had been published in the Observer (15, 22 July 1994). See Chapter 3 (this volume) for discussion of these reports.

12 The president of Tāmua and Pule, Fa’amatuainu, ‘said that even babies and children who can not read or write were included in the petition as their parents can sign for them as they are the ones taking care of them and feeding them’ (Samoa Bulletin 22 September 1995).

13 The official results of the 1996 general elections were: HRPP 24 seats, SNDP 11 seats, Samoa Labour Party (SLP) 1, and Independents 13. First, the leader of the SLP, To’alepai Toesulusulu Si’ueva—who defeated the speaker—registered his party as the Samoa Labor Party, not as Tāmua and Pule and Āiga political party. Second, candidates in other parties registered themselves as independents. Third, the two main parties are still the HRPP and SNDP. Fourth, HRPP still has substantive support among the public. Fifth, it is reasonable to conclude that voters value other considerations in the selection of their Members of Parliament above their traditional affiliation to Tāmua and Pule. Or perhaps Tāmua and Pule are powerless when it comes to election of leaders under the current political setup because their traditional influence has already been substantially and adversely affected by the concept of parliamentary constituencies (So’o 1998 and forthcoming).

14 Official figures obtained from the Legislative Assembly office. Of the 39,941 who voted on this question, 14,383 voted Yes, and 22,299 voted No. 3,329 votes were classified as informal, or were rejected. They included ballots that were not properly marked.

15 The Electoral Amendment Act 1995 forbids candidates and their campaign committees from withholding IDs (Article 30).
Local government in Samoa and the search for balance

Unasa L.F. Va’a

This chapter is about the social, economic and political relationship between the Government of Samoa and the villages. I argue that ‘traditional’ political concerns define this relationship, impinge upon the modern state, and continue to characterise government–village relations to this day.

In a small, close-knit society like Samoa the relationship between the national government and villages is important. The success of the act of governing depends largely on the proper functioning of this reciprocal relationship. The government must be satisfied that the villages respect its authority and the villages must feel assured that the government is not exploiting them. Balance and equality are the key to this relationship. Where equity is lacking, usually due to some area of disagreement between the parties, for instance over land or human rights issues, tensions result.

In Samoan history when the Mau a Pule (Savai’i orators and their supporters) threatened to destabilise the German administration of Governor Wilhelm Solf in 1909, Solf called on German warships to help put down the rebellion and had the Mau leader, Lauaki Namulau’ulu Mamoe, and his supporters, deported to German Saipan. When a later Mau leader, Taisi O.F. Nelson threatened to do the same in the late 1920s, the New Zealand Administrator Richardson had him deported also. Exiling these leaders might have temporarily relieved the difficulties of colonial administrators, but it did nothing to ease Samoan grievances in the long run. In due course these grievances surfaced again in different
Governance in Samoa contexts and under new leaders and the cycle of conflict was, and still is, repeated.

Administrations in Samoa, whether colonial or indigenous, have found it extremely important to lay down sound policies governing the political relationships between the national government and villages, where the vast majority of Samoans live under the influence of their village and district *fono* (council). The pre-Christian national governments encountered problems in their relationships with the villages, as did the colonial governments, and as have the post-independence governments. The development of good relations between the centre and margin, urban and rural sectors, nation and village, will continue to be one of the key policy issues of the future. Much is at stake: land reform, the unequivocal recognition of human rights and access to social, economic and political opportunities.

The pre-Christian era

In the pre-European period (before the arrival of the London Missionary Society evangelists in the 1830s), the villages largely governed themselves by means of the village *fono*. The village *fono* comprising the *matai* (chiefs) of a village, exercised legislative, judicial and executive functions in relation to village affairs. The next level of government was the district *fono* which usually convened only in times of war when villages united. The districts varied in size. The central government was called the *malō* (victorious side), and the losing party was the *vāivāi*, which today we would call the opposition (Gilson 1970:29ff).

The *malō* was not necessarily an all-encompassing national party. In fact it was more often a political clique representing a particular district or a combination of districts,4 whose claim to legitimacy usually lay in being the victor in war. There were many such wars in the pre-Christian era and they were one of the primary means of deciding legitimacy in the art of ruling over other villages in Samoa.

The *malō* was usually headed by a leader who held one of the highest titles in the land, such as Malietoa, Tui Aana, Tui Atua, or several of these simultaneously. The main exception to the rule was when the Manono *taulāītu* (spirit medium and war leader) Tamafaiga Leiataua, headed the government in the late 1820s. After his assassination in 1830, Samoa was never again to experience stable indigenous self-government due mainly to the inconclusive nature of the civil wars in the nineteenth century.
The leader of the government had key chiefly advisers known as the *tūmua* (those who stand first). The position of *tūmua* was hereditary and those entitled to it came from four main villages: Lufilufi in the east of 'Upolu, Leulumoega in the west and Malie and Afega in the middle (Meleisea 1987a). Of course, not all the chiefs of *tūmua* would accompany the government leader at any one time. The leader would have his/her favourites who in turn would be accompanied by his/her immediate relatives, soldiers and close followers. So that, in effect, when a government leader who was called the *tupu* (king) went on a journey around the villages, a large entourage usually followed.

The economics of supporting a large number of people who formed the *tupu*’s household presented a problem in the pre-Christian era. To alleviate this the *tupu*’s officials devised an efficient system to feed, clothe and house the king’s relatives, servants and supporters. The burden would fall mostly on the villages and districts in the immediate area where the king might be staying, but all villages and districts were ultimately affected. Each village would take turns to provide food and other provisions, including precious items such as fine mats for the king and court.

In short, power extended from the centre outwards while tribute flowed in towards the centre. The tribute was not merely to sustain the physical needs of the royal court but also to ensure the maintenance of status at the centre. Further, it was part of a system that maintained inferiority and relative poverty at the margin, especially among the former enemies of the regime. This practice of weakening the opposition physically, mentally and economically so that they would not have the wherewithal to rebel had long been a favoured way of maintaining power.

The subject villages themselves accepted the rule of the central government only if they were the supporters of the government. Villages belonging to the opposition *itu váiváí*, however, would only accept the rule of the government when compelled to do so and rebellion was common. The *malo* and *váiváí* sides vied constantly for political power. This state of affairs characterised the traditional system of government (Gilson 1970:62).

In the pre-Christian political system, authority resided in the *mana* of the aspiring national political leader. Defined broadly *mana* is an invisible divine power obtained from the ancient gods through kinship connection, real or mythological. Second, leadership depended on the ability to win wars on the battlefields. Of course, it was not always easy to select the right candidate for the highest political office (that of *tafa'ifā*, holder of
the four highest titles in Samoa) and it was not unusual for the districts to end up supporting different candidates. When this happened war was the inevitable outcome. For instance, when King Faumuina died (circa 1650), he left two sons, Fonoti and Vaafusuaga, and one daughter, Samalaulu, as heirs (called the *tupufia* (royal heirs) of Faumuina). All wanted to be the ruler so a civil war erupted in which Vaafusuaga and Samalaulu joined forces against their elder brother. Fonoti won nevertheless and succeeded Faumuina. He was induced, however, to grant concessions to his younger siblings or risk prolongation of the civil war.

**The colonial period**

From the time of the first incursion of the white man in the 1830s—missionaries, beachcombers, naval captains, consuls and traders—the traditional way of establishing governments began to decline. Through their contact with the Europeans, Samoans saw alternative ways of forming and maintaining governments. The Europeans in Samoa tried to introduce forms of government with which they were more familiar, such as a centralised government consisting of a constitutional monarch, parliament, executive and judiciary. Serious attempts were made to introduce these forms, notably under the Steinberger regime in the 1870s (Gilson 1970:293ff) but none was successful because of the political intrigues of Germany, Britain and the United States.

Thus, when the Samoan islands were finally divided between Germany and the United States as a result of the 1899 Treaty of Berlin, the colonial powers found it difficult to implement European forms of government. In Western Samoa, the first German governor, Dr Wilhelm Solf, encountered difficulties from the former officials of the pre-partition Samoan government who still viewed government in terms of the old *malo-vaivai* relationship. Solf's initial strategy was to undermine the traditional Samoan political system then eliminate it altogether (Davidson 1967:79ff). This inevitably led to a political confrontation between Solf and the traditional rulers made up of the powerful orator groups, *Pule ma Tumua*. The ensuing lengthy dispute was eventually resolved when Solf banished the leaders of *Pule ma Tumua*, but the Samoan belief in the right to resist the central government survived and was to reappear in a similar resistance movement against the New Zealand administration in the late 1920s.
With the advent of World War I in 1914, New Zealand paramilitary forces occupied Western Samoa, and when the war ended the League of Nations appointed New Zealand the administering authority of Western Samoa. The New Zealand administration for the most part retained the German infrastructure of government (an institution inherently alien to the vast majority of the population), including the *Fono a Faipule*, an advisory group to the central government, and the *pulenu’u*. At the same time it also inherited many of the political difficulties that beset the German colonial administrators. At the core of these problems was controversy over the central government’s influence over, and interference with, Samoan customs and traditions.

In the early 1920s the New Zealand Administrator, Brigadier George Richardson, set in motion a series of policies which were later to cause problems among Samoans. In 1924 Richardson replaced the traditional district *fono* with a different body, also called the district council but with a different composition. The traditional district *fono* consisted of the leading chiefs and orators from its villages; Richardson’s council consisted of village representatives (selected by the Administrator on the basis of political allegiance to the colonial power rather than on traditional criteria) and Samoan officials of the central government, such as the *pulefa’ato’aga* (agricultural inspectors) and the *pulenu’u* (village mayors). The president was to be the *faipule*, the government nominee for the *Fono a Faipule*. The new district council was responsible for overseeing all local matters pertaining to roads, water supplies, sanitation and village development. In this way Richardson was continuing the policy started by the German administrators (1900–14) of replacing Samoan political structures with colonial ones.

More controversial was Richardson’s attempt at land reform. According to tradition, the *matai* held all family lands as trustee for members of a family. The *matai* alone had the authority to allocate family lands for the use of family members. Under Richardson’s proposal, the *matai* was compelled to subdivide family lands for use by individuals and any uncultivated land ‘was to be transferred to that of the district councils’ for redistribution (Davidson 1967:107). These and other unpopular measures eventually led to political confrontation between the *Mau*, a pressure group formed by part-Europeans and Samoans, and the New Zealand Administration, that raged from 1926 to 1935.

After 1935, with the victory of the Labour Party in New Zealand, New Zealand policy towards Western Samoa changed radically. The
policy was to do very little in Samoa other than 'prepare' the Samoans for national independence, finally achieved in 1962. However the basic problem of the lack of cordial and trusting relations between the villages and the central government was never resolved. It was to be left to the new Independent State of Western Samoa, run by Samoans themselves, to resolve. The Samoan government inherited this problem in 1962 and has never been able to resolve it satisfactorily.

The Samoan Government

If pre and post independence Samoan political leaders had thought that national independence would solve the country’s internal problems, they were greatly mistaken. The political aims and ambitions held by village leaders and the central government frequently clash as events since 1962 have illustrated. In this section disagreement over land and human rights issues will be discussed.

Recent examples of land disputes between the villages and the central government include opposition by Lalomauga villagers to the government’s Sauniatu hydro project; Satuimalufilufi villagers to airport development; and Vaiusu villagers to the government’s national park at Tuanaaimato. In the Satuimalufilufi and Vaiusu incidents, police had to arm themselves at various stages of the conflict. Fortunately, peaceful mediation was achieved and no blood was shed.

Human rights are another serious matter for the central government. With the introduction of Westernised forms of government, the relationship between village and central government has undergone major changes. The central government guarantees basic human rights and insists that the law be applied equally to all citizens. Theoretically no-one is above the law. But what if a village takes the law into its own hands in order to implement a fono decision? Villages have in the past denied the rights of others to exercise their religion within village boundaries because of a fono decision supporting only one (as in Vaiee Village which accepts only the Congregational Christian Church) or particular church denominations (as in Afega Village which accepts only four church denominations). The reason given for such decisions is that there is a need to promote consensus in village affairs. Too many church denominations may encourage factionalism and is seen as a threat to social order and harmony. In the case of Afega, the matai feel that the village has already made a commitment to the clergy of these four church denominations which have been accorded the status of feagaiga. As
feagaiga, the pastors of these four church denominations are given special treatment as befits their social rank: they and members of their families are cared for and protected by the four village congregations. Hence, according to the logic of the fono, there is no room for the introduction of another church denomination into the village. Basically then, which church denomination (or denominations) a village will support is in large part dependent on the historical links between a particular village and a particular church (or churches).

Such rules do not bar villagers from belonging to other churches but stipulate that they practice their ‘other’ religions outside village boundaries. Some enterprising villagers have challenged this regulation with disastrous results as at Salamumu Village which permits only the Methodist Church within its boundaries. In Salamumu Village a group of Samoans calling themselves the Brethren (‘Au Uso) conducted Bible meetings and prayer services at the home of a village matai by the name of Levao Lamese. Despite repeated protests from the village fono, the group continued to hold these meetings. The result was that the family of Levao was banished by order of the fono. When the deadline of Saturday 17 October 1998 was reached and the family still had not obeyed the order, villagers arrived to evict them and their church friends. They came with ‘ropes, machetes, large sticks and bottles of gasoline’, burnt Levao’s house, roped the church members ‘to large sticks like pigs’ and carried them ‘about a mile to the road intersection’ where they were unceremoniously dumped on the roadside (The Samoa Observer 18 October 1998). The five men who were so roped, including their leader Suisamoa Mataafa, suffered extensive cuts and bruises and loss of dignity but were lucky to be alive.9

In some cases, offenders against village regulations concerning religious matters have been carried to a hot umu (earth oven) to be burnt alive. This nearly happened at Samalaeulu Village, Savai‘i. Samalaeulu accepts only the Catholic faith with which it has historical links extending back to the arrival in 1845 of the first Catholic missionaries in Samoa. Thus when a 33-year old resident attempted to introduce Mormonism into the village, the fono banished the man from the village. The man refused to leave so the fono decided to impose the maximum sentence imposed by tradition, namely, baking him in an oven. On 25 February, a large umu was prepared in the village malae (meeting place). The man was seized, tied up and dragged to the centre of the malae while villagers arrived with firewood to carry out the sentence. Fortunately, church officials arrived and interceded on his behalf. When the police arrived
from Tuasivi, the church officials had already largely defused the tense situation and the man, married with six children, was taken to a nearby village for his own safety (The Samoa Observer 2 March 1997).

So-called human rights violations in the villages do not always concern religion. Sometimes they involve other matters of disagreement between a villager and the powerful village fono. For instance, in 1993 Nuutai Mafulu, a matai in his 40s, challenged the power of the fono at Lona, a remote village at Fagaloa. Nuutai’s extended family had had a running feud with the village council since 1983 and the family’s matai, Matautia, had taken legal action several times against Lona Village and the district. Predictably the fono retaliated by banning Matautia from the village and finally from the district for life (The Samoa Observer 8 October 1993) even though since February 1993, Matautia had tried to make peace with the village and district fono. In 1990, Nuutai, who had lived in New Zealand for 20 years, returned and settled at Lona. He started a business in merchandising and transportation and soon became successful. Nuutai would later be described in court by defence witnesses as haughty in his relations with the village. It was also said that he failed to participate in village affairs or to pay fines imposed by the Lona fono. On 25 September 1993, the Lona fono held a meeting to discuss ways of dealing with Nuutai’s family’s refusal to pay an overdue fine. The verdict was that the village would boycott Nuutai’s businesses: his shop and bus. As yet, there was no death sentence. But later in the evening another incident occurred leading to tragedy.

The fono had instructed a young man to ring the curfew bell which was near Nuutai’s house. Nuutai stopped the young man from carrying out his duty on the grounds that he was trespassing (even though other villagers disputed the ownership of the land in question). When Nuutai’s action was reported to the fono, another hurried meeting was called at 8pm that night and this time the sentence of death and destruction of all his property (mu le foaga) was imposed on Nuutai. The result was that a member of the ‘aumaga, said to be the victim’s cousin, shot and killed Nuutai. His house, store, bus, jeep and another vehicle were burnt to the ground ‘and an order to tie up his wife and four children and then be taken [sic] to the meeting house was stopped by a church minister’ (The Samoa Observer 29 September 1993). This killing of a matai shocked the nation and caused reverberations internationally, especially from human rights groups. The issue was painted in public debate in terms of group versus individual rights.
The question arises: did the *fono* intend a literal enforcement of its ruling or just a ‘ceremonial killing’ and destruction of property. In the Magistrate’s Court, counsel for the Lona villagers, Enoka Puni, stated that the death sentence imposed by the village council was in accordance with the Village *Fono* Act of 1990. In Section 6, the act provides the village council with the right to impose punishment and to exercise that authority in accordance with custom and usage. In his judgment, however, Magistrate Bill Dillon said Section 6 of the Village *Fono* Act clearly states that punishments should only be fines of food, money or animals and an undertaking from a villager facing punishment to work in the village. Otherwise, he added, other punishments were to be reviewed by the Land and Titles Court (*The Samoa Observer* 7 November 1993).

In the aftermath of the killing, Sesela Afoa Mateo, a man in his 30s, was charged with the murder. Six senior *matai* of the Lona *fono* were charged with acting to incite, counsel or procure an unlawful act and causing the death of Nuutai Mafulu. They were also charged with inciting, counseling or procuring various persons of Lona to willfully damage the property of Nuutai Mafulu ‘with the knowledge that the endangerment of a life was likely to follow’ (*The Samoa Observer* 2 November 1993). Their average age was 62 years, the youngest being 52 and the oldest 77. In addition another 29 villagers were charged with a variety of offences including arson, throwing stones and willful damage.

Mateo was found guilty of the murder of Nuutai and sentenced to death in March 1994. The six senior *matai* pleaded guilty to an amended charge of inciting people to damage the deceased’s house and other properties. They were each fined ST$800, a sentence which prompted the Attorney General’s Office to lodge an appeal on the grounds that the sentence was ‘inadequate and inappropriate’. The rest of the villagers were found guilty of arson and willful damage to property. Some received light prison sentences; most received fines of between ST$200–300. So ended one of the most dramatic trials in Samoan history, marked as it was by a clash between the values of an outdated political system and a modern one based on the Westminster model.

In another famous case at the district of Falelatai in 1982, Tariu Tuivaiti challenged the authority of a village *fono*. The *fono* expelled him from his village and had his house burnt down. He successfully brought a counter-suit to have his privileges restored but the police were not able to enforce the court decision. It would have involved taking the whole village to prison.
The Falelatai case shows that even if a disgruntled villager succeeds in a court action against the village fono, enforcement of a court decision could be impossible. This does not apply to criminal cases, where murder or manslaughter is involved, and in which the police are usually more successful. This is demonstrated in the success of the police in implementing the requirements of the law with respect to the villagers of Lona. A large part of the success of this trial was due to the police approach involving the observance of Samoan traditional etiquette. Instead of going into the village with guns blazing they resorted to the Samoan style of negotiation. Village honour was maintained and the law observed.

As these examples would suggest, the interests and sphere of power of a village fono can directly clash with that of a government guaranteeing equal rights to all its citizens. At its core this conflict is about power. Can a village fono make and enforce a regulation which violates basic human freedoms such as the right to worship in one’s own village of residence? And has the central government the right to overrule a decision of a village fono? From the above account it seems that this conflict between the centre and the local or periphery has not been satisfactorily resolved in Samoan politics. Or, to put it another way, the lines of authority have not been clearly established.

The question then arises, why has this conflict not been resolved? Why hasn’t the Samoan government, or for that matter the German or New Zealand administrations of the past been able to resolve a problem which was faced and resolved by the US administration in American Samoa in the early 1900s? The US administration had a very simple solution. Any violation of human rights that was against the US constitution was prohibited. Thus certain Samoan customs were abolished. These included: reservation of certain fish for a paramount chief, public defloration of a bride (fa’amasei’au), banishment from one’s village, and most certainly any village regulation against the free exercise of religion. These issues no longer affect American Samoans but they still cause tension in Western Samoa. Why? Is it due to a lack of political will by the country’s political leaders?

American success can be attributed mainly to the establishment of simple, clear-cut goals. These were based on the notion that no Samoan customs which contradict the US constitution would be allowed to continue. This led to the extinction of several important customs. One important outcome was the discontinuation of the bestowal of the Tui Manua title in the Manua group of islands because the US constitution
did not permit monarchies. Thus, while the Americans legislated against manifestations of traditional political power, the Germans and New Zealanders tried to cope with the sources of that power. The latter were more concerned about their relationship with the traditional power centres such as *Pule ma Tumua* and thus their struggles with those centres for dominance lasted much longer and proved more difficult. Since independence, Samoan government strategies for establishing control in the villages have been much handicapped by the politicians' own close relationships with their constituencies. Politicians are dependent on their constituents' votes for re-election, and they cannot forget that once out of power, they usually return to live in their villages. Thus, their very close ties with their mostly rural constituencies usually counterbalance any centralist tendencies they might entertain.

**Government–village relations today**

Relations between the central government and the villages, the traditional fountain of power, have always been important to both sides. The government is seen as the source of economic wealth, in the form of cash handouts and agricultural development, but more particularly in the form of infrastructure such as roads, water supply and electricity. Government, on the other hand, sees village stability as essential to good governance. More importantly, because of the distribution of parliamentary seats the rural constituencies are a potent force in national politics.

To please the rural constituencies, government has placated political elements in the villages. In the past, these political elements were essentially the *matai* but with the introduction of universal suffrage in the early 1990s, people over 21 years of age gained political importance. The development of party politics has ironically encouraged the central government to take a more conciliatory attitude toward villages than in the past. For to gain or to maintain power, a political party must woo and obtain the support of the majority of the rural constituencies. This means giving these constituencies a larger portion of the economic pie in the form of infrastructural development projects.

The trend towards the development of closer ties between the central government and the villages is illustrated in the history of the Department of Internal Affairs. Before 1983, relations with the villages were conducted mainly through the Rural Development Division of the Prime Minister's Department. In 1983, the Legislative Assembly passed the Internal Affairs
and Rural Development Act, which set up the Internal Affairs and Rural Development Advisory Committee. This committee, subsequently renamed the Executive Committee in 1995, became one of three sections within the Prime Minister’s Department (the others being the Secretariat and Foreign Affairs).

By 1995, the work of the committee had expanded sufficiently to warrant its becoming a new separate department. The Internal Affairs Act of 1995 laid down the functions of the department and consolidated the *Pule'nu'u* Act of 1976 and the Internal Affairs and Rural Development Act of 1983. In 1996, the Internal Affairs Act was further amended to regulate the appointments of the *pule'nu'u* (government agents in traditional villages). These remain the key pieces of legislation which regulate government–village relations today.

Consolidation of these acts was deemed necessary because of the shortcomings of the earlier acts. For instance, while the *Pule'nu'u* Act of 1976 legalised the establishment of the office of *pule'nu'u*, the powers given to the *pule'nu'u* were too vague. Basically, *pule'nu'u* were required to do what the government wanted.

Under the 1995 act, the duties of the *pule'nu'u* and the *sui o le malo* (government agents in new, non-traditional villages) are clearly spelt out. Each is required to

- promote harmony in the village
- encourage the maintenance of law and order in the village
- ensure the free flow of communication between the *Ali'i* and *Faipule* of his village and the government and the ministry
- prepare the births, deaths, and *matai* title certificates for members of the village
- encourage health and sanitation activities in the village
- promote development projects that are economically viable as well as culturally and environmentally sensitive
- ensure that access roads in and about the village are properly maintained
- organise a traditional network in the village to prevent vandalism of street lights, traffic lights, road signs, pipeline, and village and public facilities
- report to the police the use by any person of dynamite or chemicals for fishing
- encourage village cleanliness and beautification
- inform the committee and the council of new pests and diseases evident in or about the village
• assist government officials in conducting surveys, research, and debt collection in the village
• maintain records of village activities
• render at all times such assistance as the government may need in the successful implementation and completion of its projects both locally and nationally
• perform other duties imposed by legislation or in accordance with government policy as defined or communicated by the minister.

The method of appointing pulenu‘u (including sui o le malo) has also changed. From 1976 to 1983, the villages recommended names to the Prime Minister who in turn recommended them to the Head of State who made the appointments. But in 1995, because of the tendency of some villages to change their pulenu‘u before the end of their term, the Minister made nominations to the Cabinet which in turn made the appointments. With the 1996 amendment, the Secretary of Internal Affairs now makes the nominations and the Minister (who is presently also the Prime Minister) makes the appointments. Presently, there are 154 pulenu‘u and sui o le malo in ‘Upolu and 80 in Savai‘i.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is undoubtedly the catalyst in the government’s policies toward the politically significant rural areas. It was established with the mission ‘to provide for the promotion of the wellbeing of villages, village authority, to provide for the appointment of pulenu‘u and sui o le malo and to provide for other matters relating to the culture and traditions of Western Samoa’. Its many functions clearly mark it as the vital link in the formulation and implementation of government policies towards the villages.

As stated by the Secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Savea Fomai Sapolu, government–village relations involve two-way communication. The ministry serves not only to inform village authorities of government policy and wishes but also to communicate to government authorities the wishes of the village organisations. In the process policy is negotiated.

Although the government’s position is quite clear in the 1995 Act, problematic areas such as land disputes and human rights issues remain. Solutions to these problems are still largely the product of lengthy and difficult negotiations.

The law itself is ambiguous. Take, for instance, the provisions of the constitution. Part II, Article 11, Clause (1) of the constitution guarantees religious freedom.
Every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and, in public or private, to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

The next clause (2) restricts the above right.

Nothing in Clause (1) shall affect the operation of any existing law or prevent the State from making any law in so far as that existing law or the law so made imposes reasonable restrictions on the exercise of the right conferred under the provisions of that Clause in the interests of national security or of public order, health or morals, or for protecting the rights and freedom of others, including their rights and freedom to observe and practice their religion without the unsolicited interference of members of other religions.

Clause (2) of Article 11 can be used by the village fono to restrict religious choice in their village. Although the state has so far made no law specifically restricting choice of religion, it has provided for such a situation indirectly in the form of the Village Fono Act of 1990. This act complements the provisions of the Land and Titles Act 1981 by giving more power to the village councils. It was, for instance, meant ‘to validate and empower the exercise of power and authority by Village Fono in accordance with the custom and usage of their villages and to confirm or grant certain powers; and to provide for incidental matters’ (Government of Samoa 1993c). In simple terms it endorses decisions made by village councils.

Thus village fono are empowered to impose punishments in accordance with the custom of the village. Such punishment may be a fine in money, fine mats, animals, food, a combination of these things, or community service. Village authority, however, does not extend to people who do not normally live in the village or people who live on land outside the village jurisdiction. People punished as a result of a village fono decision may appeal to the Land and Titles Court. The appeal process, however, is time consuming, and even the victorious litigant may never succeed in having the court decision implemented.

In addition to ensuring the development of friendly relations between the villages and government, the ministry is also empowered to ‘undertake, assist in, cooperate with and encourage the development, collection, maintenance and publication of data, statistics, reports, financial proposals and any other material relevant to the preparation and administration of local government and village authority’
(Government of Samoa 1995). To this end, it has supervised the collection of data for a series of publications, two of which are now awaiting Cabinet approval. These are *Tusi Faalupega* on village honorifics and *Tusi Taulasea* on traditional medicine. A third book, the ministry’s most ambitious project so far, will contain geographical, social, economic and other information about all the villages of Samoa, much like a ‘village encyclopaedia’.

**Conclusion**

The conflict between village and central government which characterised the national politics of Samoa during the German and New Zealand colonial periods, 1900-14 and 1914-61 respectively, continues to threaten the stability of Samoan politics today. The conflict is inherent in the very nature of the relationship. On the one hand, villages are aware of their traditional rights and obligations, which are closely linked to kinship ties. These rights and obligations are divinely ordained and sanctioned by centuries of practice. On the other hand, modern government is an introduced phenomenon, a newcomer to the political scene with its own rules and practices which are often at odds with those existing in the villages. One threatens to dominate the other; each has its own tactics and strategies for survival. A victory by one is often short-lived, for the nature of the relationship is a continual search for balance. It would seem that, as long as this balance is maintained, political stability is the result. Where it is disrupted, as the history of Samoa shows in the last 100 years, there is often turmoil.

In order for the German Administration of 1900-14 to succeed in implementing its new policies to ensure German cultural, ideological and political hegemony, Samoan ideology had to be first undermined then replaced. This colonial strategy did not succeed because Samoan leaders eventually were able to see through it and fought back through the *Mau a Pule*, led by the famous Samoan orator Lauaki (Davidson 1967: 86f). The New Zealand Administration followed in 1914 and while it gained some measure of goodwill before 1926, it also failed to undermine and destroy Samoan institutions because, like the German Administration before it, it faced powerful opposition from those defending Samoan values and interests. The question then is in what way is the modern Samoan government different from its colonial counterparts?

There is no simple answer to this question. In certain crucial respects the two are indistinguishable, especially in the centralisation of authority.
and the need to promote respect for that central authority. Today in Samoa, respect for the central government is gained in the first place through citizens' observance of constitutional procedures that are already in place. In the second place, it is gained through wise government policies and this includes sound policies affecting village development and life.

The colonial governments and modern Samoan governments have had a common outlook towards the acquisition of political control, that is, the more the better. Ultimately, the government would like to replace traditional village power with its own, and to some extent, the pulenu‘u and pulefa‘ato‘aga represent the first stage of government incursion into village affairs.

However, the perspectives and methodologies of the colonial and indigenous governments have differed. Colonials were foreigners ethnically, culturally and linguistically. Samoan officials are indigenous and share the ethnic, cultural and linguistic features of the majority of the population. While this may facilitate the processes of government in some respects, it also imposes certain restrictions due largely to the social and kinship relationships of the actors. This may result in the inability of Samoan governments to implement to the fullest extent some of their policies, especially those relating to customary lands and human rights. Added to this is the inescapable fact that Samoan politicians do not dare carry out policies which may cost them future parliamentary elections. Thus, they are caught between the need to implement a fully democratic form of government and the need to woo the voters, most of whom live in the villages. The result is often a lethargic approach to political development.

Although control was the avowed goal of the colonial and Samoan governments it has not always been easy to attain. The land tenure system and cultural factors have been a major obstacle to centralisation of political authority, as has been the scarcity of resources at the disposal of the governments to pursue more effectively their objectives. What was true during colonial times is still true today. Samoan governments have still not found an adequate and stable policy regarding village administration. Their presence in the village continues to be largely symbolic. Their representatives, the pulenu‘u, are not in a powerful position as they are themselves the captives of the villages. Often the pulenu‘u are caught in the middle of conflicting demands, especially if they happen to be a government-appointed pulenu‘u living in a village.
dominated by supporters of the opposition political party. Government directives may also run counter to village *fono* decisions regarding village land. Perhaps this is one reason why there has never been an outstanding *pulenu‘u* personality. *Pulenu‘u* are usually unassuming people who mostly keep records of village births, deaths and title investiture for the government. Otherwise, they have no other special place in the village *fono* and their status as *pulenu‘u* does not affect their status in the village social hierarchy one iota.

Samoan politics is more like a mosaic than an ordinary simple painting and this is one reason why it is difficult to portray accurately. Stephanie Lawson has observed that ‘[m]any aspects of Samoan politics are paradoxical, and contain any number of ambiguities and contradictions’ (1996:158f). Tensions between the centre and margin, urban and rural sectors, government and village will not end. Alliances must be continually negotiated, formed, tested and dismantled and the process started all over again. No party wishes to be dominated by another. This chapter thus ends with the question: does good governance exist where one party dominates completely or where centre and margin complement each other?

If the answer is complete dominance, what is the expression of that dominance? Would complete dominance be a situation where the central government substantially controls the social, economic and political activities of the villages? This would be possible only with the implementation of land reform, where people would have freedom over the use of their own lands. That is to say, their rights over land would not be unduly circumscribed by customary demands. This in turn would be possible only with a huge expenditure of money, something which the present Samoan government cannot afford. It thus remains an ideal only.

If the answer is complementarity, what does this consist of? Complementarity offers a more secure short-term solution because stability is maintained, but only with the cooperation of the customary authorities in the villages. Moreover it is only workable when equity is upheld. That is the crucial question for the central government. What policies constitute a balanced system of equitable relations between it and the villages? Needless to say, more research is required in this area.
Notes

1. The use of the word ‘traditional’ is a controversial one because of the vague meanings associated with it (cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). As used here, it generally means pre-Christian.

2. The *Mau a Pule* organisation opposed Dr Solf’s administration because it felt that traditional Samoan leaders were not given positions of power.

3. O.F. Nelson led a civil disobedience movement in the 1920s in protest against some of the unpopular policies of the New Zealand Administration.

4. There were eleven main traditional districts. These were, in Savai’i: Faasaleleaga, Gagaemauga, Gagaifomauga, Vaisigano, Palauli and Satupaitea; in ‘Upolu: Tumua, Ituau, Alataua, Aiga i le Tai and Vao o Fonoti.

5. These highest titles are called *papa* and are: Tui Atua (king of Atua district), Tui A’ana (king of A’ana District), Gatoaitele and Tamasoalii (both titles of the Tuamasaga district).

6. King Faumuina’s children were all from different mothers: Fonoti’s mother was Talaleomalie, daughter of Vaovasa, Gataivai; Samalaulu’s mother was Tu’uamaleulua’iali’i, daughter of Manuaifua, Afega; and Vaafusuaga’s mother was Atamulau, daughter of Segi, Amoa (Kramer 1994:225).

7. The *pulenu’u* are government representatives in the village. They are responsible for implementing government policies applicable to the villages. Their duties include the supervision of village activities relating to plantation development, cleanups and the destruction of rhinoceros beetles.

8. The *feagaiga* is the status given to a sister and through her, to all her descendants. It is a social position of honour and outranks that of the brother and his descendants (Schoeffel 1979).

9. On 18 January 1999, 56 villagers, chiefs and untitled persons, appeared in the Magistrate’s Court, Apia, charged with assault and property damage in connection with this incident at Salamumu. Charges against 10 people were later dropped. Forty six others appeared again on a range of charges including arson, assisting arson and assault with the intention to cause bodily harm. In June 1999, 32 were found guilty and fined and 14 had charges against them dismissed due to insufficient evidence. In his judgment, Magistrate Enoka Puni said: ‘This is not a case to determine whether Levao Lauese of Salamumu has a right to carry out his religious beliefs in the village or if the Village Council could lawfully restrict anyone from practising their religious beliefs. This case deals principally and solely with whether any of these defendants committed any of these offences.’ His Worship did not accept the defence’s argument that the village was the sole owner of the land.
in Salamumu and therefore every resident should obey any village decision (*The Samoa Observer* 24 June 1999).

10 It has been said that one of the main grievances that Lona Village had against Nuutai was he refused to play for the village cricket team. Instead he played for a rival team that eventually won the tournament. This was treason in the eyes of many Lona villagers.

11 Untitled young men of the village whose job is to serve the *matai*.

12 Commuted to life imprisonment. (All death sentences in Samoa are automatically commuted to life terms by the Head of State on formal appeal.)

13 Tariu who was, like Nuutai of Lona Village, a former long-term resident of New Zealand, refused to attend church on Sundays as required under village regulation.

14 Before the 1976 Act, *pulele'u* existed as part of the village scene but had no legal recognition.

15 Government agents are paid salaries and allowances from the public treasury.

16 For instance, local government bodies in the villages based on Western-style models are nigh impossible in large part because of the nature of the land tenure system (over 80 per cent of Samoan land is customary land and therefore outside the control of government).
The inquiry into the tensions between tribal and modern principles of accountability has implications for long-term village development. It deals with the complex issue of transforming oral-based social hereditary hierarchies within the global context of liberal democratic political culture and analyses the selective use of custom as a condition of past practice for personalising power.

In the literature on Samoa, the words aganu’u (customs or practices common to all villages) and aga’ifanua (custom or practices peculiar to particular villages and families) are often used interchangeably. Although the ideas they convey are inter-related they differ in very fundamental respects. An analysis of the way these terms are applied is essential for any meaningful understanding of the process of cultural transformation. Failure to distinguish the context and level in which the notions of aga’ifanua and aganu’u operate distorts history and thus development. I will demonstrate how personalised power is maintained through the selective use of aga’ifanua and aganu’u by reconstructing the banishment of a faife’au (village pastor) from his village. The implications of the selective use of these cultural notions on development efforts should become apparent at the local and national levels.

Key concepts and institutions which are relevant to this discussion include the feagaiga or brother–sister relationship, the village council of
matai constituted of titled heads of family households, the church (in particular the Congregational Christian Church), and the fa'amasino Sāmoa or Judge of the Land and Titles Court.

**Feagaiga: construction and re-construction**

Milner’s dictionary refers to feagaiga as a covenant, contract, treaty, understanding or agreement, or a Biblical testament. The original meaning referred to the relationship between a tamatane (brother) and tamafafine (sister). At the highest social levels, the sister’s son is known as the tamasa (sacred child) (Cain 1971:175; Gilson 1970:33–8). The significance of the relationship is encapsulated in the proverb

_E leai se feagaiga e sili atu lona taua i lo‘o le feagaiga a le teine ma lona tuagane_ (the most binding and sacred agreement is that between the sister and her brother).

This custom controlled the relationship and acted as a safeguarded against incest at an early age. The brother was more likely to succeed to family titles and thus to property such as land, while the sister was accorded superior ceremonial rank. She also exercised an overriding opinion (or veto) on the use of family resources and could apply a curse that resulted in misfortune or death. In an ideal situation, the brother holds executive power and the sister consultative rights.

This kinship principle was adopted in the late nineteenth century by protestant missionaries and Samoans to institutionalise the relationship between the _faife‘au_ and the _nu‘u_, the foreign _faife‘au_ fulfilling the role of the sister and the _nu‘u_ that of the brother. Over the years, as foreign missionaries withdrew in place of local pastors, a new class of families emerged. Village clergy and parishioners became powerful exponents of the principles as both indulged in friendly competition with neighbouring village parishes in amassing material goods and church contributions. Over the last thirty years, this competition has included the amount of parish contribution toward the _faife‘au_’s upkeep.

Even though the position of _faife‘au_ has not been inserted into the latest editions of the _Tusi Fa‘alupega_ (Book of Honorifics and Salutations), their position has been incorporated in the _fa‘alupega_ at all levels of custom, _aga fa‘a le atunu‘u_, _aganu‘u_ and _aga‘ifanua_. Though unacknowledged in published form, the ubiquitous _faife‘au_ is everywhere intoned and accorded equal rank with titleholders at the apex of village, district and national hierarchies. The honorific of the _faife‘au_ is _Susu mai lau Susuga_
le fa’afeagaiga (Welcome to your Excellency the covenant). It is ceremonially intoned and either precedes or immediately follows the most senior titles. The extant taboos for senior titleholders also apply to the fa’afeagaiga, and any sexual liaison between him and any of his family with any of his village parishioners is, in Samoan logic, tantamount to incest.2

The Land and Titles Court

For many Samoans, the Land and Titles Court is assumed to be the agent responsible for the creation and application of the tulafono or Western law. Because only matai sit on the Land and Titles Court, the illusion that matai also adjudicate on common law is sustained. This case, in which a faife’au was banished by the village council, illustrates how elements of custom and law are manipulated to serve the political ends of powerful village personalities.

Falelatai, the village context

At the national level, Falelatai and its neighbouring village, Samatau, form an electoral constituency. Although of equal status in state affairs, within the custom and tradition of village authority, they are very different. Both ali’i and tulafale types of matai are found in each polity. But Falelatai is an ali’i oriented polity while Samatau is a tulafale oriented polity. At all levels of Samoan politics, this political distinction determines attitudes and behaviour.3 Samatau derives its social standing from the orators of Leulumoega village, the ancient capital of A’ana.4 In Samatau, the ali’i titles such as Taetele, Tilive’a, Fiame, Te’o, and Meleisea are normally considered of higher status than the tulafale titles of Mano’o and Puni. The actual power is however wielded by the tulafale titleholders. Within Falelatai, the tulafale titleholders live and exercise autonomy in the pitonu’u of Pata. In overall village district affairs, power is wielded by the ali’i titleholders.

Falelatai is an example of an ultra-conservative village. It is the last village district on the airport road and has often been described as a backwater. It was also the scene of an infamous case of banishment and destruction of property in 1980 (Meleisea 1987a:214–20). The public outrage emanating from this case was a major factor in the creation of the 1990 Village Fono Act.

Falelatai lies over 60 kilometres southwest of Apia and 21 kilometres south of Faleolo airport. From the airport, it is 35 minutes by bus or 25
minutes by car along the main northwest road skirting the western half of 'Upolu. Approximately two kilometres west of Faleolo is Mulifanua wharf, the docking port for inter-island ferries plying the Apolima Strait between 'Upolu and Savai'i to Salelologa wharf. From Mulifanua, the buses turn south through the villages of Sagafili, Samea, Fuailolo'o, Lalovi and Satuimalufilufi followed by the resettled island/village communities of Apolima Uta and Manono Uta. At Cape Tulivae, the bus makes another left turn to face east along the main south road. Within minutes, the first pitonu'u (sub-village) of Samatau Village appears.

Hampered by the lack of signposts or natural boundaries, outsiders cannot tell where they are at any point along the journey. Villages merge into each other undistinguished. It is only during major annual events such as the Teuila Festival in September that village signposts appear and normally remain over the Christmas and New Year holiday period. Stray animals, careless drivers and the corrosive effects of sun, sea and rain ensure no permanence.

In 1995, the first inkling one had of arriving at Falelatai was the sight of a medium size weatherboard structure with a corrugated iron roof. It was the government hospital. Earlier there was a signpost in the rocky front yard, which announced the unassuming structure as the Falelatai and Samatau District Hospital. The hospital is situated in Si'ufaga, the first of Falelatai’s eight pitonu'u. A small room next to the main entrance of the hospital building houses the Post Office and the only telephone line in the district. Churches dominate the village skyline. A hundred metres further on, the road passes between the Congregational Christian Church (CCC) building and the pastor’s residence. Twenty metres further up the road stands the Catholic Church building. In the mid 1980s, the telephone line was re-wired from the hospital first to the front yard of the Si'ufaga pastor’s residence and later to inside his house. The drive through the remaining pitonu'u takes 10–15 minutes. At Sama'ilauago (Sama'í), the last of the pitonu'u, the road ends. About twenty meters above the turnaround, with a commanding view of the shoreline of Sama'í and Falevai, stands the Catholic Church building. As in many villages, the élite fono prides itself on being fiercely independent and governing according to the principles of fa'avae based on ancient customs and traditions.

**Village governance**

The 330 villages exercise authority over their day-to-day affairs through village councils. The 1990 Village Fono Act strengthened village authority.
In Falelatai, once village council decisions are made, they are intoned censoriously as the *afioga tatasi* (council decree). They are deemed irreversible and punishments for infringements of council decrees range from monetary fines to banishment. There are two forms of banishment. Victims may be banned from village government but remain in their village land and houses, or a wholesale expropriation of the family and its property from the village may be ordered (commonly known as *ati ma le lau*). Anything left standing is demolished and burnt. With the second form of banishment, all memory of any form of existence, past, present or future is erased. While unyielding in defence of traditional authority as prescribed by ancient *fa'alupega*, Falelatai villagers have also adopted modern ideas and technology—Falelatai was one of the first villages to enjoy electricity when its *fono* and *ekalesia* (congregation) purchased a diesel-powered generator in 1960. Many villagers also built houses with corrugated iron roofs using earnings from cash crop sales.

**Church organisation**

The most significant factor reinforcing traditional authority are the churches, in particular the Protestant CCC. In Falelatai, the CCC churches are located in Matautu, Pata and Si’ufaga. Regular village-wide gatherings rally around church activities, such as preparation for the *fonotele* (annual general meetings) and annual fund-raising for the CCC. The rival Catholic Church is located in Si’ufaga and Sama’i, respectively the first and last sub-villages.

In the political affairs of Falelatai as a whole, the Matautu-locus, the *maota* (residential site) of the Sa Nanai descent group, commands influence over Pata and Si’ufaga, in terms of population and location. The roles played by some of Matautu’s members ensure its prominence in contemporary village affairs. A further factor is that, in the mid 1830s, Matautu acquired the distinction of being the local base for the London Missionary Society religion in Falelatai after its introduction and subsequent failure in another pitonu ‘u called Matanofo. From this event, Matautu earned the honorific phrase ‘*malae o le filemu*’ (the ground of peace). Today, it continues to accommodate the gothic falesa (church structure) completed in 1959, an expansive concrete *maota o le galuega* (religious meeting house/hall) constructed in 1963, and a modern residential house, which Samoans call a European house, replete with modern amenities for the *faife’au* and his family. The hall was dismantled and rebuilt in 1998 at a cost conservatively estimated at ST$500,000.
In 1989, the Matautu Women's Committee made history when it purchased a minibus at a cost of ST$30,000 for its faife'au as part of fa'a Mati (the annual March collection, which is normally restricted to refurbishing the church and the pastor's residence). The minibus was to assist the faife'au with his ministry and community work. Falelatai lacks people with good education and the minibus was to transport school children to schools. When the then faife'au, Uale Taimalelagi, was banished in 1993, he left with the minibus. His successor, Tauti'aga Senara, arrived the following year and after the hall was reconstructed, the Women's Committee purchased a vehicle worth approximately ST$100,000. In addition, the Matautu congregation gifted Senara with half an acre of freehold land at Vaitele.

Pata's former prominence as the central village malae as recorded by honorifics has been eclipsed by ali'i-oriented polities. Of the three divisions, Matautu is the largest administrative centre and hosts the fono for the Falefa and the Falefitu when warranted. Pata is ignored and consulted on a needs only basis. The following case study of a clash between the faife'au and village fono of Matautu illustrates a major dilemma faced by villages in modern Samoa. The issues concern the encounter between ancient principles of governance operating in the context of a modern political structure.

The banishment of a faife'au

After 15 years of continuous ministering in the Matautu parish from August 1948 to 1963, the pugnacious Faoliu 'Ainu'u and his wife Emeline finally succumbed to advancing years and retired to their home in Leone, American Samoa. 'Ainu'u left a lasting and considerable contribution. His skills in carpentry led to major construction work in Matautu, including the present church building at Utumoa (completed in 1959), the school building (1958), and the church hall (1963). The purchase of a diesel engine for the electrification of the parish in 1960 was also undertaken during his service (Tuimaleali'ifano 1998:Appendix I).

When Matautu went looking for a successor, they found it in the form of a missionary on leave with his family from his post in Papua New Guinea. The young faife'au and his family arrived in Matautu on 30 July 1964. Keilani Tagoa'i (also known as Keilani Pele), originally from Iva in Savai'i, was 38-years old and his wife Mary (nee Bentley of Fa'ato'ia) 26. They had two sons when they arrived, and Mary gave birth to their third son later in the year. They had three more children in Matautu.
As missionaries in Papua New Guinea, they had worked for six years from 1958 at Gabagaba and Central Rigo. Within a short period in Matautu, Tagoa’i had established a reputation as a committed pastor and as a tagata o le aganu’u (one learned in custom), for which he was widely respected and called upon by educational institutions as an assessor of oratory competitions. His sermons, a blend of scriptures and aganu’u, were delivered in fine oratory. In ceremonial gatherings, chiefs and orators ceremonially intoned him as the feagaiga a le Tui A’ana (the covenant of Tui A’ana).

Within the CCC establishment, Matautu’s reputation as a consistent top fundraiser earned Tagoa’i long-term membership in the church’s Education and powerful Finance Committees. His wife Mary was very active at all levels of the church organisation. She served as the national treasurer and was a regular delegate on overseas conferences. As a measure of the esteem in which they were held by the parish, Tagoa’i was amongst the highest paid faifeto in Samoa during the 1970s and 1980s, with an average monthly alofa, or collection, of ST$3,000 from parishioners. This amount excluded weekly donations in both cash and kind from the parish associated with life crisis and constant movements of parishioners overseas. This widely circulated information conveyed Matautu’s economic strength.

The Matautu parish lauded it over neighbouring parishes such as Pata and Si’ufaga, and indeed all of Samoa. The message was clear—it was the leading parish in the district. Prestige, status and wealth were measured by the size of the public contribution. It had the largest church, the largest alofa, and the largest taulaga (annual church collection). It was a marketing factor for future vacancies.

In 1988, Tagoa’i’s 25 years of service came to an abrupt end when his wife and a small group of women attempted to clarify an alleged misappropriation of funds. By questioning the Treasurer’s report they challenged chiefly power.

**Village governance: custom and law**

The story of Matautu reveals the process of selective recounting of the past to serve present purposes. The protagonists differed in their interests, and this is reflected in their differing recollections of events. The question asked by the small group of women sought to clarify the present, but those being questioned chose to ignore the question by invoking custom. The incident recounted in this chapter occurred in 1988, but the factors leading to it go back to the 1970s.
Tensions between the faife’au and the Matautu parish

In the mid 1970s, tensions appeared between the faife’au and the Matautu parish when a courting relationship developed between the faife’au’s teenage daughter and a young parishioner, the grandson of the head of the Sa Anae lineage. Because they had violated the terms of the feagaiga (between the faife’au and the village parish), the young couple left for New Zealand and got married in 1985. Though safe in New Zealand, they feared the repercussions of their actions on their families living in Matautu.

About three months later, their fears were realised—on 15 June 1985, the young parishioner’s grandfather, Anae Taeoali’i, who had been the ali’i matua since the early 1970s, died. Later, the Matautu fono met and confirmed the solifa’avae (violation of the covenant). The faife’au and his family expected an order to leave, but Misa Sautia as the spokesman for the Matautu fono conveyed the decision that, in lieu of a punishment, a fa’aleleiga (reconciliation) was to be effected. The family of Sa Anae was fined. A large fine mat was presented to the faife’au’s family by Sa Anae seeking forgiveness. In contrast, the faife’au’s family did not make any presentation.

The Sa Anae party had satisfied the requirements of custom, and the matter rested there. Nothing more needed to be said. The young couple moved to Apia where Tagao’i had built a family home.

Prior to the 1988 incident, however, an important change had occurred. Misa Sautia, the ali’i matua of the Sa Misa clan had replaced the long time chairman of the Matautu fono, Anae Taeoali’i, who had died on 15 June 1985. Misa died the following year and was succeeded by Nanai Faitala as the ali’i matua of the Sa Nanai clan.

The protagonists

At the centre of the controversy that developed in the mid 1980s were the wives of the powerful men in the village—Mary, the wife of the faife’au, and Alaisea, wife of Nanai Faitala, the new chairman of the village council. Both women came from families with a strong church background, possessed dominating personalities, and were experienced in managing money. Mary was the National Treasurer of the Church’s Women’s Committee and Alaisea was Head Cashier at the national hospital. At the time of his chairmanship, Nanai Faitala also held the important position of ti’akono toeaina or senior deacon of the Falelatai/ Samatau church district as well as being choirmaster, organist and financial controller of the chiefs’ choir.
Village pride is expressed through support and material contributions to the church. In the mid 1980s, major renovations to the church building were in progress when funds ran out. In both legend and fact, Samoan women are reputed to have inherited a sustained capacity to complete work left undone by their men folk. When the village council asked the Women’s Committee for resources to refurbish the church with new pews, the committee proudly rose to the occasion. They withdrew ST$4,000 from their savings bank account at the Bank of Western Samoa to open an account with an Apia merchant who was also their local Member of Parliament. The agreement included monthly repayments of ST$300 to be made out of the proceeds from the sale of taro, obtained from family garden plots, which the women harvested, transported and sold at the Savalalo market in Apia. The majority of the work fell on younger women, most of whom were young mothers with children—some still breast-feeding—while their husbands were renovating the church or gardening. The responsibility for collecting the money and paying the account fell on the then chairman of the Matautu Village fono, Nanai Faitala, and his wife. Both had regular employment in Apia. Nanai was a senior fa’amasino Sāmoa at the Land and Titles Court, a position which entitled him to sit on the Magistrate’s court as an Assessor. When the account was close to being settled, Tagoa’i and Mary took three months leave in Australia. When they returned, the Treasurer, Alaisea, reported that the account had been settled with a credit balance of ST$400 remaining. The Assistant Secretary, Gatapu Tuivaiti, however, quietly confided to Mary that the credit should have been ST$2,635.97. Mary and Gatapu waited for an opportune moment to question what they clearly perceived as a discrepancy.

Financial versus customary accountability

The moment came a few months later. The Women’s Committee was hosting visitors from the Utulei congregation in American Samoa. When the visit ended, Alaisea announced her wish to finalise the financial report on the church pews. Alaisea began with the expenses incurred for the Utulei visitors, and stated that the ST$400 credit balance from the church pew account had gone to cover the expenses incurred in hosting the American Samoan visitors. Mary then replied and suggested to Alaisea that according to her written record of monthly repayments, the credit should be ST$2,635.97. Mary’s concern was endorsed by the next speaker, Ta’alefili, whose husband was Anae Tonu, the ali‘i matua of Sa Anae and
The wives of the other senior chiefs from the clans of Sa Misa and Sa Sila kept quiet. They were in-laws to Alaisea. Alaisea also kept quiet after Mary questioned the financial report. When the meeting ended and members began to make their way home, Alaisea approached Mary and privately inquired after the welfare of her children. After Mary briefed her, they parted amicably. Whether by coincidence or design, Nanai Faitala arrived from New Zealand that same week and immediately convened the Matautu fono the following Saturday morning. On Saturday afternoon, the council re-assembled at the church hall in front of the faife’aui’s residence. Tagoa’i and Mary were summoned.

After dispensing with the introductory protocols, a co-titleholder of the Nanai title, Nanai Taulia, then formally explained the purpose of the meeting that had taken place earlier that day. ‘The fono,’ he said, ‘had decided to tatala (open) the feagaiga (covenant)’. He explained that the faife’aui and his family had violated the feagaiga through the marriage of the faife’aui’s daughter to a village parishioner.

After the decision was conveyed, Nanai Faitala got up and began to leave. As Tagoa’i collected his thoughts, Nanai was on his feet and making for the door. During the verbal mêlée that ensued, Mary called out to Nanai asking where the rest of the money had gone. When he ignored her, she bluntly declared, ‘ua ‘ai tupe lou faletua!’ (your wife has eaten the money!). Nanai had walked as far as the hall entrance. He turned and replied, ‘Mele, ta te fetaui i luma o le tulafono’ (Mary, we will meet before the law). Mary responded, ‘Ua lelei, o le a iloa ai i na po’o ai na ‘aia tupe’ (Good, we will then know who ate the money).

At this juncture Tagoa’i uttered words which have left an unforgettable impression in the minds of Falelatai villagers to this day.

‘Talofa e ‘Aiga, ua ‘ai e lago le tofa!’ (Pity on you ‘Aiga (Falefa), the flies have had the best of your counsel!)’

Thus the memory of the fa’aleleiga in 1986, presided over by Misa Sautia (and which should have become aga’ifanua) was no longer acknowledged. There was no appeal and Tagoa’i’s 25 years of service was disregarded.

When Mary declared before Nanai Faitala that the real reason for their banishment was her questioning of the state of the bank accounts, Nanai, in reply, invoked the authority of common law by drawing on his then standing as a senior fa’amasino Sāmoa in the Land and Titles Court. He threatened Mary and Tagoa’i with court action for slander and defamation.
The nature of village governance

At this point, one might ask how democratic the council’s decision was? Ideally, in families with a large number of titleholders, such as Sa Sila, Sa Nanai and Sa Misa, the senior holder consults and seeks a consensus of opinion from co-titleholders. The final decision lies ultimately with the ali‘i matua. Any dissenting opinion, even if held by a majority of co-titleholders, collapses in deference to the ali‘i matua. The council proper is thus comprised only of the ali‘i matua, deliberating inside the house, while co-titleholders remain outside observing and listening to their respective senior titleholder. No one may venture an opinion, irrespective of their age, special skills or superior knowledge. A co-titleholder with expert knowledge might be asked to offer an opinion, but it is offered with the permission of the senior member. Everyone is expected to know his place, and who is next in line. For example, despite the power that Misa Telefoni Retzlaff commands as a Member of Parliament and Cabinet member at the national level, he belongs to this category of co-titleholders. As a Minister of State and Member of Parliament, Misa may sit in the house and advise the council. If, in future, the constituency decides on another candidate for parliament, Misa as a co-titleholder will return to the queue for the senior titleholder of the Sa Misa clan.

The village council was convened and membership was confined to the major family descent groups of the falefā (house of four) who were represented by their ali‘i matua. They comprised Nanai Faitala for Sa Nanai, Misa Li‘a for Sa Misa, Sila Seali‘itu for Sa Sila, and Anae Tonu for Sa Anae. The descent group of Sa Fasavalu was represented by Salu Lafi, because the ali‘i matua of Sa Fasavalu was absent.

The division that appeared in the Women’s Committee meeting was replayed at the village council meeting. The lone objection to Nanai Faitala’s call for banishment of the faifeʻau came from Anae Tonu. When it came to numbers, Nanai had the clear majority. So, in terms of the right of free expression of views, the criterion for democracy was met, but inside this consultative process kin connections dictated the outcome. The Chairman, Nanai Faitala, was an elder brother of the former ali‘i matua of Sa Misa (Misa Li‘a) and a cousin of the ali‘i matua of Sa Sila (Sila Seali‘itu). The remaining ali‘i matua, Anae Tonu, was not immediate kin and thus isolated in his dissent. Outside the falefā, the spokesman for the Sa Fasavalu clan fell in with Nanai Faitala.
Other avenues of recourse

The remaining actors that could have made a difference had they chosen to do so, were the holder of the paramount village title, the tama’aiga Tuimaleali’ifano, the faife’au toeaina or senior pastor of the village district of Falelatai/Samatau, and the Member of Parliament. The Tuimaleali’ifano title was held by Atonio Va’aleto’a Eti, a newcomer who had lived most of his life in another village with his mother on Tuimaleali’ifano family land and in Apia where he had worked as a policeman. His appointment in July 1977 by the Land and Titles Court had been rejected by the village fono for eight years until reconciliation was effected in 1985. Tuimaleali’ifano Va’aleto’a Eti had completed a law degree Australia in 1986 and was attached to the Attorney-General’s Office in Apia when he returned to Samoa. The office was then headed by Misa Telefoni Retzlaff.

When the issue of banishment was discussed by the fono in 1988, Tuimaleali’ifano Va’aleto’a Eti was purported to have been called to Matautu and fêted with a sua (food presentation) on arrival. Nanai Faitala then briefed him on the difference of views that had arisen between the faife’au and the council and of their decision. Tuimaleali’ifano acceded to Nanai’s point of view. With the benefit of hindsight, it is difficult to see what Tuimaleali’ifano Eti could have done. The village council had only just accepted his appointment by the Land and Titles Court in 1977. Before his acceptance in 1985, he did not participate in village council meetings and his ability to exert any influence on the village fono in 1988 was doubtful.

The second option was through the church. Its status in the village hierarchy allowed for the senior faife’au of the village district to intervene in matters of great importance. In Tagoa’i’s case however, this did not materialise. Terna Koria had been the toeaina (senior pastor) for Falelatai and Samatau since the 1960s. He and Tagoa’i had worked together in Papua New Guinea. When Tagoa’i paid a farewell call on his superior, Koria replied

\[ Talofa e, o mai, o mai ina o, a lua lailoa i lena nu’u leaga (Pity on you. Come. Go. You have been pained needlessly by that unworthy village). \]

On the same evening that Tagoa’i and his family departed, Nanai Faitala also visited Koria in Pata and informed him of the banishment. When Koria asked about the nature of the banishment, Nanai claimed that the trouble over the misappropriation of committee money lay with
Tagoa’i and his wife. Matautu had a great deal of power over the other village parishes. Matautu was ali’i-oriented and Pata was tulafale-oriented. With the consent of a tama’aiga (Tuimaleai’ifano), the Matautu decision was perhaps too much for Koria to reconsider as a toeaina. The third possibility was the Member of Parliament, Misa Telefoni, but this was not an option for Tagoa’i. Nanai Faitala had sponsored Retzlaff’s installation to the Misa title in July 1984 in return for Retzlaff’s assistance in some matters (Meleisea 1987:220, 255; Tuimaleali’ifano 1997). Shortly after his installation, Nanai successfully manoeuvred for Misa Retzlaff’s election to parliament as Member for the Falelatai/Samatau constituency in 1988.

Conclusion

Falelatai is an example of a village that prides itself on maintaining a strong sense of tradition based on ancient practices which appear to be premised on personalised power. This case demonstrates that village justice is premised on the politics of those in power.

Three different courses of action followed the violation of the covenant. First, the violation of the feagaiga was settled within the parameters of custom through a fa’aleleiga. The covenant remained intact and the faife’au continued his work. Second, in a totally unrelated incident concerning financial mismanagement, the fa’aleleiga was forgotten and the earlier violation of custom was resurrected to serve personalised politics. As so often happens in oral-based communities the memory of the reconciliation was effectively erased with the changing of positions of power and no written records were kept which could counter this. When the centre of power changed, the past was recreated. Third, when the charge of misappropriation was alleged as the reason for invoking aganu’u, the faife’au and his wife were threatened by the chairman’s appeal to the tūlafono through his position as the then senior fa’amasino Sāmoa of the Land and Titles Court and assessor in the Magistrate’s Court.

Thus, the selective usage of aga’ifanua, aganu’u and tūlafono, as this case demonstrates, depends on the personalities of those in power, not on democratic concepts of transparency, accountability and equity. Equivalents of these concepts in customs and traditions are difficult to find. The determinants of power under customs and traditions are whose tribe is in power and whose interests are being served or threatened. Unfortunately, the allegations and counter-allegations over the
misappropriation of funds never reached the court. Without a bureaucracy documenting the fa'a'avae upon which meetings of village fono base their proceedings and decisions, village authority will continue to be subject to personalised power struggles. The church succumbed to the reinterpretation of custom and history. By judicious manipulation of his standing in custom and law, Nanai Faitala maintained his authority in the village. In the minds of the majority of Matautu villagers, justice in terms of custom and law sided with the Matautu fono. In the years following Tagoa'ī's departure, the power exercised by the fono reinforced chiefly hierarchy.

On a conceptual level, within an oral framework of fa'aSāmoa, the basis of modern village governance lies on tribal principles of kith and kin. Unless a modern form of local village government evolves, with a bureaucracy regulating financial transactions and monitoring the accountability of decisions pronounced as custom, long-term development will be frustrated. Tagoa'ī and his family have long forgiven and forgotten their humiliation at the hands of the Matautu village council. Matautu villagers have not however forgotten his words which they often quote today—'E sa'o lava le tala a le faife'au, Talofa e Aiga, ua 'ai e lago le tofa' (the faife'au was right when he said 'pity on you Aiga, the flies have had the best of your counsel'). According to one Samoan matai, the saying denotes that parasitic flies are attracted to carcasses—the village decision-making body is bereft of sound advice. The 'flies' are evident everywhere in villages and towns. Vast tracts of village lands lie idle as thousands of villagers join the humiliating queues outside foreign High Commissions hoping for a new start elsewhere. The minimum wage rate of ST$1.40 (US$0.60)—barely above starvation level—makes life anywhere more bearable than in parasitic paradise.

**Postscript**

In subsequent interviews conducted in Samoa from 7–14 June 1999, Nanai Faitala claimed the sole reason for the banishment of Tagoa'ī and his family was due to the violation of custom through the marriage of the young parishioner and the faife'au's daughter. This was confirmed in an interview with both Nanai Faitala and his wife Gatoloai Alaisea Nele on 13 June 1999. In the second interview, Gatoloai confirmed the violation by invoking another alleged liaison between Tagoa'ī's son and a parishioner's daughter. Tagoa'ī and Mere were aware of this allegation when interviewed in 1995 and vehemently denied it citing medical
evidence and family movements at the time. Such is the nature and use of custom in contemporary Samoan society today—unless substantiated and proven before a court, allegations and counter-allegations using custom to verify particular views will continue to provide a source of uneasy relations between families, villages and districts. In July 1999, Nanai Faitala’s house and vehicle in Matautu were gutted by fire (*Samoa Observer*, 21 July 1999). No foul play is suspected so far.29

**Acknowledgment**

Fieldwork was conducted from December 1994 to March 95. I would like to acknowledge the University of the South Pacific Research Committee for funding research from 7–14 June 1999 in which I was able to interview Nanai Faitala and Gatoloai Alaisa Nele, a former faife’au toeaina of Falelatai/Samatau, other members of the Matautu clergy, and various members of the Matautu Women’s Committee. I would also like to thank Dr Ian Campbell for his interest in this research.

**Notes**

1 The ancient oral charter governing Samoan villages is called the fa'alupega and is recited at every formal gathering. The fa'alupega provides the political superstructure for village and district authority. It is a set of honorifics and abbreviated (if somewhat convoluted) histories of village titles and lineages.

2 The scope of the faife’au’s family varies in different villages but refers to those connected to him. For example, in the early 1980s, the sister of a pastor (Siaosi Leleimalefaga) serving Utuali’i village married a local. The village fono (but not the faife’au) married the couple. The fono considered the faife’au’s sister a member of his family, but did not hold him responsible for her actions (Ioane Lafoa’i, personal communication, 4 December 1995).

3 The distinctive differences between villages is contained in Shore’s *Sala’ilua, A Samoan Mystery* (1982). A’ea’au Leavaise’eta Peniamina, a holder of an ali’i title, told me that in Falealupu, the village to which his A’ea’au title belongs, power lies with orators who are referred to as ‘o le fa’autaga ma le moe ile to’afo o le tapuaiga’ (the collective decision of the four that wait and listen). A’ea’au added that ‘ali’i titleholders remain passive when major decisions are delivered. Abuse of this power is common, of course’ (personal communication, 23 July 1999).

4 Some of the highest ali’i titles including So’oa’emalagai, Tuioti, Taualafai’i live in Leulumoega. Effective power is exercised by
orators, namely the *tulafale-ali'i* Alipia and the *faleiva* (the house of nine).

5 ‘1. pull up (by the roots)’ (Milner 1966:26). Similar meanings are also conveyed in other villages through the phrases *soloa ma le aufuefue* and *Mu o le foaga*. The latter is used in Salamumumu (personal communication, Le'aula Aneteru, 12 June 1999).

6 Kingmakers (in the sense of taking important decisions and actions on behalf of the village district) in recent times have included Nanai Utupo in the 1940s and Nanai Sopo in the 1970s. Two Nanai titleholders were *fa'amasino Samoa* for the Land and Titles Court, Nanai Vatau in 1960s followed by (then Misa) Nanai Faitala in the 1970–80s. Former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Nonumalo Suafao L.S. was also a title-holder. The title was also conferred on the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jim Bolger, in 1997.

7 Personal communication, Papali'I Uale Taimalelagi, June 1999.

8 Personal communication, Misa Telefoni, 11 June 1999. Taimalelagi paid off the outstanding amount of ST$8,000 and eventually sold it.

9 The actual cost quoted was ST$87,000 without insurance. Each able-bodied woman was levied ST$520. A further levy of ST$200 was collected from the spouses of titled men to pay the balance.

10 The political lineage of Falelatai is *falefitu o le 'Aiga Tau'ana* lineage. For purposes of internal village governance, the lineage is split in two groups, the *falefa* (house of four) and the *faletolu* (the house of three). The *falefa* is centred in Matautu on the west end of Falelatai and the *faletolu* is centred in Si'ufaga on the east end of Falelatai.

11 Pastor Keilani Tagoa'i. Interviewed in May 1985, Matautu, Falelatai.

12 Mr D.C. Mann, Principal of Leulumoega Fou College, to Tagoa'i, 21 March 1977.

13 The reference was to the founder of the Church in Matautu, Tui A'ana Sualauvi.

14 The Committee office bearers were Chairperson Mary Tagoa'i, Secretary Gatapu Tuivaiti Isara, and Treasurer Alaisea Nele. Alaisea subsequently acquired the title of *Gatoloai* from Lalomalava village in Savai'i.

15 In lieu of pigs, they presented 20 cartons of mackerel (personal communication, Mary Tagoa'i). According to Anae's eldest daughter, Ipu Polotaivao, they presented 2 heads of cattle, 16 cartons of mackerel, 15 cartons of biscuits and a large fine mat to the *faife'au* for the *fa'amagaloga* (personal communication, 8 and 13 June 1999).

16 With the benefit of hindsight, the decision deviated from customary arrangement. Given that it was accepted, however, it stood as a decision that would have been internalised over the years as an *aga'ifanua* peculiar to Matautu thus setting a precedent.

18 This account is based on the recollection of various people present on that afternoon.
19 I am grateful to A'e'au Leavaise'eta Peniamina for this version of the saying.
20 Co-titleholders are referred to as o le 'au nofo suafa (literally, those sitting on the title).
21 He was Attorney-General under the Va'ai Kolone government at the time of the village conflict in 1986. Misa was elected to Parliament in 1988 and joined the Samoan National Development Party. In 1990, he joined Tofilau Eti's Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) government and was appointed Minister of Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries. When the HRPP was returned to power in 1996, he was appointed Minister of Health.
22 Many co-titleholders migrate or die without attaining the status of ali'i matua.
23 The senior titleholder, Sila Fa'amalaga, was very old at this time.
24 The two descent groups of Sa Salu and Sa 'Auva'aipeau are branches of Sa Fasavala.
25 Vaialua, a sub-village of Nofoali'i.
26 The strongest opposition to Va'aleto'a Eti's appointment was Anae Taeoali'i. As chairman of the fono he finally succumbed to his younger peers and ended the division within the falefà.
27 Mary Tagoa'i (personal communication, 6 December 1995). Tema Koria was reluctant to intervene in matters in which the Aiga Taua'ana family had decided upon (personal communication, 11 June 1999).
28 It is easy to speculate what this arrangement would have become over time for Matautu.
29 Personal communication, Tuala Karanita Enari, 29 July 1999.
Governance has become a popular topic of research because agencies such as the World Bank now argue that successful ‘development’ depends on a certain manner of government. The word development is used here in the sense used by international agencies, implying economic growth and rising standards of living as measured by statistics for education, health and life expectancy, among others. It is now argued that such development requires a government that operates in a transparent manner, so that its actions are known to its citizens. In other words—government which is accountable for its actions. Values about governance are rooted in culture, and not all cultures value the kind of openness and acceptance of individual rights that western thinkers have argued to be the basis of human development. There is debate whether the kind of cultural values which underlie modernisation in the West are really necessary for a country to be economically successful. Amartya Sen (1998) firmly dismisses the argument that it is cultural imperialism for non-Western societies to ‘...be encouraged and pressed to conform to Western values of liberty and freedom’. His answer is that ‘the notion of human rights builds on the idea of a shared humanity. These rights are not derived from citizenship of any country, or membership of any nation, but taken as entitlements of every human being. The concept of universal human rights is, in this sense, a uniting idea’ (Sen 1998).

Samuel Huntington (1996) argues that we are in the early stages of new global conflicts between different culture regions over differing
pathways, which have competing values about ‘development’. Twenty years ago, we often talked about the particular amalgam of political, economic and cultural features of our region as the ‘Pacific way.’ This is now such a cliché that we are embarrassed to use the term to refer to a set of attitudes and values that were supposed to characterise our region. Epeli Hau‘ofa (Hau‘ofa et al. 1993) demystified such slogans by pointing out that they were dreamt up by élites who had more in common with each other than with the ordinary people of their own countries. Lately, however, it has become popular once again to talk about the Pacific in a collective way. For example, recent World Bank studies and the Pacific 2010 series produced by the National Centre for Development Studies have pointed out the ‘paradox’ of the Pacific islands—despite high levels of aid, populations are growing but not economies. Predicting that aid is drying up, these studies point out that without economic growth, education, health, and public infrastructure cannot improve, because there will be no money to pay for these things (World Bank 1993b; Cole 1993).

The present recipe for solving this problem is the application of policy reforms, usually at the instigation of the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank, or other donors. This usually only occurs when the country has reached such a severe financial crisis that it can no longer pay its wages and bills, let alone its overseas debts. Many countries of the region have experienced misappropriation of public money by politicians and heads of government agencies. The forest industries of Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea have a long history of corruption. The Vanuatu army kidnapped the president to force the government to pay soldiers’ wages. Outspoken journalists in Tonga have been imprisoned—a lesson to those who are too critical—and charges of sedition have been levelled against members of the opposition in Samoa for criticising government policy. Most tragic is the recent murder of a Samoan cabinet minister—a representative of the younger generation of politicians—allegedly at the instigation of members of the old guard.

Stephanie Lawson’s (1996) disapproving analysis of government and tradition in the Pacific islands presents the unsurprising conclusion that a ‘traditional’ element lingers. Indeed, to understand the problem, we need look no further than Max Weber’s analysis. The different basis of legitimacy which characterises ‘traditional’ and ‘rational legal’ forms of political authority is that the latter is based on formal laws and regulations, while the former is based on hereditary privileges attached to leaders. In the discussion of the ‘politics of tradition,’ anthropologists
have been interested in the way in which Pacific leaders and authority in Pacific societies have invoked culture and tradition as a means of justifying their behaviour. The politics of tradition, however, has some of its roots in colonial intervention.

Institutions which we have been asked to revere because of their traditional nature, such as the Samoan matai system, the Tongan monarchy or the Fijian Great Council of Chiefs, were all colonial compromises between traditional and modern forms of government. The modern arbitrator of Samoan custom, the Land and Titles Court, was founded to enable the central government to become involved in questions of chiefly succession. Indeed, by inventing the Land and Titles Court, the German administration had hoped to do away with the whole basis of chiefly authority. All these things happened such a long time ago that people today see them as features of their society which make them unique and different from other societies. Most Tongans feel some sort of pride in their King, and Samoans feel that their fa’amatai is what makes them a particular sort of people.

When Samoa became independent in 1962, it adopted a constitution which, it hoped, would combine the best elements of Samoan and Western political institutions. It provided us with two systems of legitimacy to draw upon. One was the system of chiefly authority, which was based on the idea that titleholders would represent the interests of the extended families who gave them their titles. The other was more vaguely defined—a set of Western liberal principles, such as individual rights, religious freedom, equality under law and so on. The contradictions between these two sets of principles were not really a problem in 1962, because most people lived in villages in a semi-subsistence economy, and migration and influences of the outside world had a minimal impact. Since then Samoa has experienced changes which have made Samoans among the most ‘globalised’ people in the world. During the 1970s and 1980s, approximately one-third of Samoa’s population moved overseas, forming large communities in the United States, New Zealand and Australia. Within two decades, Samoa has become, in effect, a nation without geographic boundaries.

This process has affected the political system, because emigration has had economic impacts which have promoted individualism. For example, the two village censuses carried out by Penelope Schoeffel in 1976 and 1986 showed that while the population had not grown, the number of households had sharply increased. The practice of splitting titles between multiple incumbents increased during this period, reflecting the fact that
families are breaking up into smaller units. Consequently, prior to the 1991 elections and following a national referendum, the government amended the Electoral Act to give universal suffrage to all people over 21 (previously only registered *matai* voted). At the same time, as a sort of trade-off for this democratic concession, parliament voted for an extension of the parliamentary term from three to five years, and passed an act giving village councils greater powers to enact and enforce village by-laws. These changes, instituted by a government led by a party calling itself the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP), were accompanied by a great deal of rhetoric about the transition to democracy.

Despite this supposed transition to a more democratic system of government, it is commonly believed that corruption exists in Samoa, even at the highest levels. Until 1994, there were persistent rumours that certain ministers and heads of department had formed companies headed by close relatives, which were being awarded government contracts involving very large sums of public money uncontested. When a local newspaper cautiously alluded to these activities, Prime Minister Tofilau Eti Alesana stood up in parliament and compared the local press to ‘a lot of little stones rolling in the gutter’. We must recognise that rumour mongering has been a popular local pastime for a long time. After all, in the 1890s, Robert Louis Stevenson pointed out that if ever the town of Apia was to have a coat of arms, it should be emblazoned with the motto ‘Enter Rumour Painted with Tongues’.

These rumours were given more substance in 1994 when the Controller and Chief Auditor, Sua Rimoni Ah Chong, presented his report to parliament. This document gave details of extensive official corruption. Although nobody was surprised at the contents of his report, many were surprised and relieved that the Chief Auditor had found the courage to speak out. Samoa is a small country with few senior jobs, so outspokenness is generally bad for one’s career. In response to these revelations the government appointed a commission of inquiry. After many months had passed, the findings of the commission were presented in a document so strangely written that nobody could really understand it. Because the Chief Auditor was found to have exceeded his authority, the charges he made were ignored. He was suspended, then removed from his position. In 1997 the post was amended, constitutionally restricting what used to be a life-long contract to a three-year contract. In the last election, held in 1996, the HRPP was returned to office. Although it did not have a clear majority, it was able to persuade a
number of independents to help it form government. Several parliamentarians named in the Auditor General’s report have been re-elected and re-appointed to cabinet. Similarly, many of the heads of departments implicated still hold their positions.2

Why is it, then, that this sort of public dishonour seems to have caused so little concern in Samoa? I suggest that the problems are linked to the fact that Samoans are living in two worlds, a situation which is breeding a kind of moral confusion. The problem is not that there are contradictions between new and old principles, but that these two sets of principles can be selectively invoked to justify almost any action. For example, Samoan cultural principles disapprove of questioning, challenging or criticising the chiefs, and by extension the government. At the same time, in today’s world, prestige and power come from the possession of money, and to obtain money it is necessary to be a determined individualist. A story will illustrate my point.

The case of the two-storey house

The village I grew up in has a population of 200–300 people. It is governed by a council of matai who hold about 21 village titles. Some of the titles are held by more than one holder, so altogether there are about 30 matai. Of these, two titles are the most senior in the village and the surrounding district. When I was growing up, the two titles were individually held, but both have now been split, so each has several holders.

My story concerns two holders of these senior titles, whom I shall call Va’a and Alia. They are both middle-aged men with adult children, and both live away from the village in town or overseas. One has a small but not very successful store, which is run by his wife, and has served several terms as a backbencher in parliament. The other is a subsistence farmer who lived for most of his life in a small fale Samoa, but recently, with the help of his children overseas, built himself a small modern style house (fale Palagi).

About five years ago these two chiefs filed a petition in the Lands and Titles Court to stop a junior chief called Solomona from completing the two-storey house which he was building next to the main road behind the village. In response to the petition of the two high chiefs, The Lands and Titles Court sent an order notifying Solomona about the objection and asking him to stop building the house. Solomona obeyed the order and continues to live in rooms behind his shop. After two years the court
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Case is still pending and the house still stands half completed. It is quite common in Samoan custom for titles to carry with them certain privileges, especially if the titles are of high rank. High titles usually carry special rights to be addressed in certain ways—the right to confer certain titles, to wear a *tuiga* (head-dress) on certain occasions, and to build a house in a certain location, among others. It is not unusual for modern versions of particular privileges to be added. For example, it is common for high titles to carry with them the right to be served tea out of a separate teapot while everyone else drinks from a common pot.

Solomona, the owner of the unfinished two-storey house, is about 40 years old and is regarded as one of the most successful businessmen in the district. Unlike most other well-off people in Samoa, he did not get his capital by working overseas. He began about 12 years ago with a small store on his family land in the village. A few years later he took advantage of a government fisheries development project which enabled him to buy a fishing boat. Then, assisted by his younger brothers, he built a successful enterprise, fishing twice a day then selling the catch at the Apia market. After a year he bought a second boat and recently bought a third. With the income gained from fishing, he extended his store, bought a truck and a small van, and a small herd of cattle which he grazed on family coconut land. He soon dominated trading in the village, and became one of the leading traders in the district. The only other store in the village belonged to one of the high chiefs, Va‘a.

Determined to expand his business, he abandoned the old store and relocated to the main road, where he was able to attract more customers from traffic passing through the district. Solomona also started a small banana plantation nearby, and a year later began work on his two-storey house. The land to which he relocated is regarded as ‘*tuāmaota‘*, referring to the fact that it is at the back of the village, distinguishing it from the important sites round the *malae*. The site has no chiefly connotations. Indeed, Solomona’s house is being built on the site once occupied by the village pigsty.

Solomona has always lived in the village, which is quite unusual because the emigration rate is very high. He attended primary, intermediate and junior high school there, then became a subsistence farmer and fisherman, gradually accumulating the means to start his business. People say he is like his mother’s late father, who was renowned in the village for his hard work and known throughout the district as a *tautai* (master fisherman). Solomona’s grandfather was also the first Samoan in the district to own and operate a bus, which was not only
very useful for the village, but very much admired. So, in the 1960s, when Solomona’s grandfather was very old, one of the previous holders of the two high titles of the village split the title he held, and bestowed it on Solomona’s grandfather. He did this to reward him for his service and achievements. Because Solomona’s grandfather had somewhat tenous genealogical links to the title, this was a very controversial action at the time. Of the two chiefs opposing Solomona’s two-storey house, one came from a very well-known family, but the other had acquired his high title in a similarly tenuous manner.

There have been more dramatic cases of chiefs resisting innovation and change in their villages than the story of Solomona’s two-storey house. In Falelatai in 1986, a village entrepreneur was attacked, his business boycotted, and he was eventually expelled from the village because he disobeyed village conventions. At one point his fellow matai were all set to sentence him to an ancient punishment which involved trussing him to a pole like a pig and cooking him on the fire. The village pastor intervened to save him (see Chapter 10).

Another village entrepreneur in Fagaloa was less fortunate. He was shot dead, after which his house, store, and truck were burned by village youths acting on the order of the fono. The man was executed for defying the evening curfew for prayers and joining the cricket team of a rival village. Both these cases involved small business operators who had accumulated the capital for their businesses from many years of working in New Zealand. Both returned and tried to do things differently, challenging the rules of their villages. Typically, the agents of change have been returning emigrants, but this was not the case with Solomona. Although his case also involves a clash between constitutional principles and customary and individual rights, Solomona had never left the village. His behaviour was correct according to customary principles—as a young man he worked for the village youth group, and when he got his title he became a member of the fono. He is a dutiful member of the church. What is unconventional is that he has more money and status—in the modern sense—than the high chiefs of the village. Perhaps we could say that there is an uncomfortable disjunction between class and rank illustrated in this case.

Since the 1960s, there has been an increasing trend toward economic individuality in most villages. This has been accelerated by emigration and remittances, urbanisation and changing values, new farming technologies which reduce labour requirements, and a greater emphasis on nuclear families as distinct economic units. The solidarity of descent
groups and extended families has been weakened, contributing to fragmentation. Rival family branches are contesting and splitting titles and the assets attached to them. Allegiance and service to chiefs has become more tokenistic as traditional economic and political interdependencies have been weakened by the emergence of new economic and political institutions. At the same time, high-ranking chiefs continue to invoke traditional privilege to prevent those who have achieved status through the modern market economy from overshadowing them.

Although important chiefs continue to demand their traditional rights and privileges there are signs that they are no longer willing to carry out their communal responsibilities. During most of this century villages have maintained a tradition of self-reliance in which the village builds and maintains its own schools, and groups of villages—working through district councils of representatives—have built and maintained their own health centres. Villages even provided food to supplement the salaries of teachers and doctors working at village levels (although this practice was discontinued when public service salaries were increased in the early 1960s).

Although village and district leaders are still expected to organise the maintenance of public facilities, these expectations are not often met. The junior high school in my district has been gradually deteriorating since the early 1970s. About six years ago the leading chiefs of each village decided to go on a fundraising expedition in New Zealand to pay for the renovation of the school, but when the fundraising group returned no work was ever carried out. The money vanished and remains unaccounted for to this day. There are many other examples of public funds disappearing into the pockets of local leaders in similar circumstances. Even where the government provides funds for public works in villages, similar things commonly happen. In recent years, under provisions that give greater powers to local village councils, the government allocated funds to each village council for the maintenance of local plantation access roads. The amount is determined by the number of roads in the village, with the average grant for each road being ST$4,000. In one recent incident, one village council donated almost the entire road maintenance grant for the year to a new conference centre being built by the Catholic church in yet another district. Why? This happened because the village is associated with one of the paramount chiefs of Samoa, and the paramount chief in question had asked the village council to raise a donation to be given in his name. Rather than
go to the trouble of raising the funds in the usual manner, the council
decided to allocate most of their road maintenance grant for the year.

My village has only one access road and it has been the practice in
recent years for the road maintenance money to be divided among the
three high ranking ali'i and the pastors, with far smaller amounts going
to the other village matai. Not only is there no work done on the access
road, the purpose of which is to assist agricultural production, but the
money seems to be spent on card games, beer and food, with little of the
money reaching the the neediest groups in the village. A further problem
is that school committees, comprising local chiefs and orators, commonly
expect to be paid for attending meetings. This eats into the limited school
funds, leaving less to be spent on the needs of the school, the teachers
and students.

The district health centre was once maintained by a consortium of
village women’s committees who raised funds, took turns providing
voluntary help to the nurses and the doctor and weeding and cleaning
the compound. Today the health centre is deteriorating and has minimal
community support, because the leading families are able to go to town
to obtain medical care (see also Chapter 6).

We hear much today about the environmental fragility of the Pacific
Islands, and the problem of shoreline erosion. This has always been a
problem in my village, and in the past each household prevented erosion
on the foreshore near their houses by collecting large rocks and
constructing breakwaters. Today, however, it is left to the central
government to address this problem—high-ranking chiefs try to get the
government to use foreign aid to pay for a sea wall to stop the erosion.
The central government then takes the problem to international aid
donors. Again, the decline of community-mindedness has led to
deteriorating provision of social goods within the community. A change
which cannot easily be replaced by the central government.

What I find interesting—and sad—about the leadership decline is
how cynical rural people have become. One way in which people have
responded is to become more individualistic, but individualism only
works well for those who are reasonably prosperous. Families with few
material possessions were major beneficiaries of community provision
of services in the past and it is obvious that the gap between the haves
and the have-nots is increasing in rural areas as well as in town. Village
matai control the churches of Samoa as well as local government, and
have the power to fine people who show their cynicism by not attending
church. While the Village Fono Act of 1991 was heralded as a move to
reinforce and strengthen rural self-reliance, it has in fact formalised the power of matai and local hierarchies. The act allows matai to force compliance with their dictates through fines or even expulsion from the village. Increasingly, rural people see fa'aSāmoa as another word for oppression.

**Conclusion**

My story of Solomona and his two-storey house is a parable of the situation in contemporary Samoa. It illustrates my contention that the political rhetoric about rural development and self-reliance, which accompanied the introduction of universal suffrage in 1991, has little substance. These changes have in fact disguised the potential for the abuse of chiefly power. Although the people may now elect the parliament, the matai who run the country have given themselves a five-year term of office and increased powers at village level. There are few checks on abuse of the privileges which accompany high rank, which allows leaders to invoke rank to suppress dissent or competition.

I do not accept that this has always been a feature of our political system. The example of Solomona’s grandfather was just one of many that could be used to show how achievement was recognised and rewarded. What is occurring is symptomatic of a moral vacuum that has arisen among a people who are trying to live in two worlds. In Samoa, we have two concurrent sets of social and political values, either of which may be appealed to as it suits us.

Further, in Western Polynesia, we are no longer small nations of people belonging to a few small islands. Today we are nations of people without borders. We extend, as Hau’ofa (Hau’ofa et al. 1993) has pointed out, across seas, operating, as Bertam and Watters (1986) have put it, as transnational corporations of kin. We now draw unconscious distinctions between society and the state. People are both citizens of the state and members of society, but the rules of being a citizen and a member of society are not always the same. Take the case of the two chiefs in my story. They were attempting to defend traditional principles of society—the rank order of their village—even though paradoxically, they were appealing to an agency of the state, the Lands and Titles Court. However Solomona might equally well appeal to the state to uphold his rights as a citizen and his rights as an individual to build the house of his choice. The outcome of the story is still not known.
The idea of the state, of the common good on a national scale, was introduced at independence. Before that, the state was seen as the possession of the colonial power. Government was what they controlled, and families and villages were what we controlled. Before we had time to develop a consensus about what it was to be a citizen, as distinct from being the member of an extended family or a village polity, mass emigration began. This led to the further objectification, for want of a better word, of Samoan-ness to defend against outsiders. Emigration increased this process as we formed little islands of Samoan-ness in seas of Palagi society around the world. So the petition of the two chiefs against Solomona’s house is based on the convention that no one in the village—other than the holders of its paramount titles—may build a two-storey house. Because none of the high chiefs had ever owned a two-storey house, the rule, in effect, is therefore that no one in the village of lower rank may build a house of greater height than the houses of its high chiefs. Two-storey houses of course are not ‘traditional’ but they have been common in Samoa for the past century and are generally seen as being more prestigious than one-storey houses. In the past, Samoan houses displayed the rank of the occupant by the number of tiers (or the height) of the paepae (stone foundations) on which the house was built. A two-storey house could be considered the modern status equivalent of a house built on a high foundation, thus this indicator of rank was reserved for the high chiefs of the village. Local bylaws protecting the dignity of the high chiefs are quite common. For example, in the 1970s in my mother’s village, only chiefs were allowed to use umbrellas, carry briefcases, or use fans in church.

In the case of Solomona’s two-storey house, the village council of matai, the fono, did not take action against him. It could have ordered him to stop building his house or it could have fined him, as is usually done when someone breaks a village convention. The two high chiefs did not appeal to the fono, but took their case against Solomona to the Land and Titles Court themselves. By doing this, they were shifting the grounds for complaint. If Solomona was in breach of local convention, then the matter should have been for the fono to adjudicate. By taking the case to the Land and Titles Court, the two high chiefs were, in effect, asserting that the building of a two-storey house is a traditional perquisite. Defence of these elements of culture has come to be seen as virtuous, and questioning them is seen as an attack on Samoans’ integrity as a people. For those of us who live in Samoa, this has retarded the evolution of a sense of citizenship, severely damaging governance in the country.
Notes

1  This is an edited version of my chapter published in *Culture and Sustainable Development*, Antony Hooper (ed.), Asia Pacific Press, Canberra (2000). Reprinted with permission.
2  One of the ministers implicated in the Auditor General’s report is serving a life sentence for the murder of the former Minister of Public Works.
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What governance agenda for Samoa?

'Governance' was recently introduced into development terminology by the World Bank and has been popularly adopted by international aid donors in the Pacific. Governance agendas have been criticised for offering trendy and pre-ordained programs that fail to address the complexities of particular local situations. This book details how governance programs have affected some local institutions and practices in Samoa and provides practical ways for more efficiently tailoring future programs to the development needs of the country. Empirical case studies are provided on issues of nascent civil society, problems of urban management, non-government organisations working in the area of women's health, relationships between the national government and villages, and the subversion of custom and constitutional processes to personal political ambitions. The book contributes to an understanding of how to enhance the efficient accountable management of Samoa's economic, political, social and cultural resources for the benefit of all its citizens.