

Accountability in the Accounting Profession in Samoa: Exploring the Influence of *Fa'aSamoa*

Agnes Catriona Masoe
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Accountability in the Accounting Profession in Samoa:
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Agnes Catriona Masoe

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgments), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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Accountability in the Accounting Profession in Samoa: Exploring the Influence of *Fa'aSamoa*

Abstract

This research study explores the impact of *fa'aSamoa* (Samoa culture) on accountability in the accounting profession in Samoa. This study also explores the influence that culture has had on the development of the accounting profession in Samoa. Samoa is a Pacific Island nation characterised with a collective social ideology that contrast with the individualistic paradigm associated with western countries and in particular the discipline of accounting.

This study is a qualitative work and adopts a naturalistic or constructivist inquiry approach. The data was collected through a series of seventeen *talanoa* sessions conducted in early 2010 with participants from the accounting profession, standards regulators, entrepreneurs and community leaders.

The findings support the view that *fa'aSamoa* represents a collective form of accountability that contrast with that associated with the accounting profession. The implication is that *fa'aSamoa* has hindered the adoption of western forms of accountability resulting in a hybrid status that is the product of both.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This aim of this research study is to explore the impact of *fa'aSamoa* (Samoan culture) on accountability in the accounting profession in Samoa. The study acknowledges the view painted by the extant literature that Samoa maintains a collectivist social ideology that is different from that found in western capitalistic countries and in particular the accounting profession. The study discusses this impact through the experiences and views of accounting practitioners, auditors, entrepreneurs, politicians, standards regulators and the wider community. The findings are likely to benefit both the profession and the wider community by providing insights that will encourage the harmonious coexistence of *fa'aSamoa* and western accountability. This research will also guide additional studies in this area, both qualitative and quantitative.

The paper begins with a discussion of the research design and methodology and outlines the approach adopted to answer the research question (chapter 2). Chapter 3 provides a review of the literature on accountability and in particular the form of accountability associated with the accounting profession. Chapter 4 provides a summary of background to Samoa and Samoan culture. The aim of these two chapters is to establish the context within which the data analysis will be carried out. Chapter 5 discusses the empirical data, linking this back to the research question and extant literature. This chapter is broken down into several sections and align with the issues raised by the participants during the *talanoa* sessions. Chapter 6 is a summary of the research findings and contribution to the body of knowledge.

CHAPTER 2: Research Design and Methodology

2.1 *Introduction*

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology for this study. The aim of this study is to explore the impact of Samoan culture on accountability in the accounting profession. The chapter is broken down into five sections. Section 1 discusses the research question and topic together with a brief background of the rationale for this study. Section 2 discusses the methodology and the method used to collect the data. Section 3 provides a summary of the data collection and participant selection processes. Section 4 outlines the data collating steps during the analysis while section 5 provides a discussion of the fusion of culture into the research design.

2.2 *Research Question, Topic and Rationale*

The topic of this study is accountability in the accounting profession in Samoa and the role that culture has had on its development. The broad research question in this study is to find out how *fa'aSamoa* (Samoan culture) has impacted on accountability in the accounting profession in Samoa. Related questions which have also been considered include:

- What is the nature of accountability in Samoa?
- What impact does the Samoan culture have on the accounting profession?
- How does western accountability coexist with Samoa's collective society?

Samoa is one of many small and developing nations in the South Pacific. The growth in international trade, competition for foreign aid and foreign investment are important to the future economic well-being of the country (Lautensach, 2005). An inevitable part of Samoa's economic and commercial development is the need to embrace western accountability and the reporting framework of the accounting profession. A number of authors (Larmour, 2005; Meleisea, 1987b; So'o, 2005; Vaai, 1999) have identified that the

individualistic philosophy that characterises the west, contrasts and clashes with the collective mentality entrenched in Samoan culture. These studies were however carried out within a legal, political and social context and did not extend to include that of accountability and the accounting profession. The rationale for this study is to provide insights that will guide the coexistence of western accountability and *fa'aSamoa* (Samoan culture) in Samoa. This study achieves this by exploring the impact that Samoan culture has on accountability within the accounting profession.

The findings of this study are likely to benefit a wide variety of stakeholders (in Samoa and abroad) including accountants, the accounting profession, regulators, auditors, entrepreneurs and the wider community. In particular, accounting practitioners will benefit from the knowledge regarding the tensions that may otherwise frustrate the effective execution of their profession. Similarly, auditors will benefit through having a greater appreciation of *fa'aSamoa* and how they may communicate more effectively with their clients. Regulators will be guided in term of incorporating *fa'aSamoa* into the development of accounting standards and how they may be implemented. Public servants will benefit from the increased understanding of how *fa'aSamoa* influences the actions of government officials. The wider community will also benefit through understanding the principles and professional boundaries that govern the practice of accounting.

2.3 *Methodology and Method*

2.3.1 Methodology

This research is qualitative and follows the naturalistic paradigm discussed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The naturalistic inquiry approach looks to study participants in the context of their natural surroundings or environment. Furthermore, the analysis of the data also needs to incorporate the contextual significance of the participants' experiences. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) discussion of the naturalistic paradigm is broken down into five components including ontology, epistemology, generalizability, causal linkages, and the role of values. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) concur with this view and further add that qualitative

researchers are largely guided by these abstract principles and that this is the framework in which research is conducted within and data may be interpreted. These are discussed below in relation to the current study outlining the appropriateness of this approach as its methodological framework.

2.3.1.1 Ontology: the nature of reality

The nature of reality (ontology), in any study, is determined by the type and purpose of the inquiry. Ontology is defined across a continuum ranging from the definite and comprehensible (positivist), to the constructed and multiple realities of the interpretative researcher. The naturalistic inquiry approach used in this study supports the coexistence of multiple realities founded on the experiences of the participants. This is particularly important for the current research study, at two levels. Firstly, this research seeks to determine the impact of Samoan culture (one form of reality) on accountability in the accounting profession (another form of reality). Secondly, the participants have been selected to represent a diversity of stakeholders who are connected to the accounting profession in Samoa. The experiences of these stakeholders represent multiple perspectives on accountability, and the potential impact of culture on the development of the accounting profession. The constructivist paradigm (the existence of multiple realities) that characterises a naturalistic inquiry is therefore a suitable approach for this study.

The naturalistic inquiry approach proposes that reality is a construct of the experiences, both individual and collective, of the members of a society. Furthermore, this reality is not absolute and varies over time in line with the people's changing attitudes, perceptions and preferences. The current study traces the coexistence of accountability in the accounting profession and *fa'aSamoa* (Samoan culture). The merging of these two paradigms (western individual and *fa'aSamoa*) is an evolving one which potentially implies compromises on both sides. This shifting reality provides good reason for the use of the naturalistic inquiry approach.

2.3.1.2 Epistemology: relationship between the researcher and participant

Epistemology refers to the relationship between the researcher and the participant. The naturalistic paradigm supports the notion that the researcher and the participant are inseparably linked (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This contrast with positivist paradigm, which argues that in order to ensure objectivity, the researcher should be distant from those participating in the study. Furthermore, there should be no relationship, pre-existing or otherwise, between the two. This notion is incompatible with Samoan traditional society where relationships are an entrenched part of the culture. Samoa, as with other Pacific Island nations, is characterised with a community identity where relationships and relationship building are an integral part of the social norm. Samoan society follows a collectivist paradigm where individuals act in the best interest of their families, village and the wider community. The naturalistic inquiry approach, used in this study, is therefore consistent with Samoa's collectivist society.

This study takes advantage of the pre-existing relationships between the researcher and a number of the research participants. The researcher's family background and reputation has provided this current study with a number of advantages including, ease of access to data, enthusiastic interest of participants in the study and entrenched trust between the researcher and the participant. This notion is supported by Bishop (2005), whom differentiates between an insider and outsider research and argues that an insider, whom is of the cultural background to that of the study undertaken, might well undertake research in a more culturally sensitive manner compared to an outsider . This again provides another advantage for the current researcher and therefore the manner in which this study and data is conducted is approached with a sensitive and responsive manner. These relationships are typical of Samoa's closely knitted society. Another advantage for this study is the researcher's ethnic background and ability to communicate fluently in both Samoan and English. This advantage contributes positively to this study by providing a culturally sensitive setting for both researcher and the participant to encourage open and frank discussions.

2.3.1.3 Generalizability: the possibility of generalisation

The third element of a naturalistic paradigm outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) is the possibility of generalisation. In the positivist tradition, the findings are statistically generalizable. That is to say that if the experiment is repeated under the same control conditions, the outcome will be the same. In contrast, the aim of a naturalistic paradigm is to develop a body of knowledge from the realities that exist as mental construct, to provide a 'theoretical generalisation' from each participant's perception (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study adopts this notion and focuses on bringing together the views and experiences of stakeholders of the accounting profession in Samoa. The stakeholders selected for this study, as outlined in section 2.3.1.1, are insufficient to allow for statistical generalisability. Furthermore, as this study is based on Samoa only, it may not hold true for other cultures and social settings, even in the South Pacific. The approach used in the current study however offers the potential for theoretical generalizability in the same way discussed by Eisenhardt (1989) with respect to multiple case studies. In particular, the contribution to the body of knowledge from this study is to provide an extension to the literature on culture and business using Samoan empirical data. The findings may also guide further research in this area both qualitative and quantitative.

2.3.1.4 Causal linkages

The fourth characteristic of the naturalistic inquiry approach to research is that of causal linkages. In particular this approach argues that the events that we observe as outcomes are the result of multiple drivers that affect one another in a non-linear fashion. Lincoln and Guba (1985) write:

Everything influences everything else, in the here and now. Many elements are implicated in any given action, and each element interacts with all of the others in ways that change them all while simultaneously resulting in something that we as outside observers label as outcomes or effects. But the interaction has no directionality, no need to produce particular outcome, it simply happens as a product of the interaction – the mutual shaping (pp. 151-152).

This study explores the influence of culture on the accountability in the accounting profession in Samoa. This however does not suggest that the cause is one directional. By speaking to a variety of stakeholders in the accounting profession and in the Samoan culture, it is appropriate to maintain a stance that acknowledges the possibility that the accounting profession may influence Samoan culture, together with the multiple layers of Samoan society including politics, religion and *fa'aSamoa* (Samoan culture). As described in chapter 4, Samoa is a complex social hierarchy that is interweaved with relationships, beliefs, and values that uniquely characterise *fa'aSamoa*. The naturalistic inquiry framework is therefore a suitable approach for the current study.

2.3.1.5 The role of values

The last of the five characteristics of the naturalistic inquiry paradigm is that of the role of values. In the positivist paradigm, the inquirer is assumed to be value-free and therefore does not hold a perspective on the subject of the research. Furthermore the inquirer makes no value judgments on the data being collected and on the manner in which it was collected and analysed. In contrast, the naturalistic inquiry approach suggests that the inquiry (research study) is value laden. The data collected is inevitably analysed from the personal perspective of the researcher. While the value-free approach attempts to remove personal bias from the inquiry, this is often impossible in situations where the subject is linked to culture, and therefore, values. In the current study, the perceived values of the researcher is an advantage in so far as facilitating open and frank discussions with the participants (refer section 2.3.1.2).

2.3.2 Method - *Talanoa*

The method used to collect the data for this study is that of traditional *talanoa*. *Talanoa* is a common form of communication used in the Pacific Islands (Brown, Tower, & Taplin, 2005). While the word *talanoa* means to communicate in the broader sense, it is more commonly associated with verbal face-to-face dialogue (Prescott, 2008). In the Samoan language, *talanoa* means to talk or to converse about something. *Talanoa* has been used in

a number of research studies in areas of education (Manuatu, 2000; Otsuka, 2005; Vaioleti, 2003), housing (Alatini, 2004) and gambling (Guttenbeil-Pouhila, 2004). It has also been used in peace keeping talks in Fiji and in Tonga by Sitiveni Halapua (Halapua, 2003). This type of dialog in a Pacific Island context is viewed as non-threatening and is likely to promote a safe environment where frank and open face-to-face discussions can take place (Halapua, 2003). Putman (1983) in support of this notion, further adds, that in order to interpret the experiences of the research participants, it is important to appreciate their specific and collective context. In particular to this current study, appreciating this context is best achieved through interacting with them face-to-face.

The *talanoa* sessions were carried out in both Samoan and English depending on the preference of the participant. This is intended to preserve the integrity of the data being collected and to provide opportunities for the participants to relay their experiences in a manner they feel comfortable with.

2.4 *Data Collection and Participant Selection Process*

2.4.1 **Research Participants**

The selection for research participants for this study was guided by the research question discussed in section 2.2. In order to explore the impact of *fa'aSamoa* on accountability in the accounting profession, it was necessary to secure *talanoa* sessions with practicing accountants, auditors, standards regulators, politicians, entrepreneurs and representatives of the wider Samoan community. Participants were selected based on their status in the profession, membership with a professional accountant body (Certified Public Accountants), experience in the public and private sector, gender and ethnicity. A total of seventeen *talanoa* sessions were carried out in Samoa during the months of December 2009 and January 2010. Table 2.4.1 provides a summary of the number of participants within each group and the specific code for each. Three of these *talanoa* sessions were with *matai* titleholders in order to capture the views of the community and those outside of the accounting profession. The participant code is unique to each participant. However to protect the confidentiality of these participants, their actual name and identity is replaced with these codes as shown in chapter 5. The classification of the participants into groups is

based on their primary designation. A number of participants fall into more than one group as in the case of participant 4 & 13, who, although classified as politicians, are also trained and certified accountants.

Table 2.4.1: Summary of Participants

Participants Group	No. of Participants	Participant Code
Auditors/Accountants	8	1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14
Politicians	2	4 & 13
Entrepreneur	1	11
Regulators	3	3, 6 & 12
<i>Matais</i>	3	15, 16, & 17
Total	17	

2.4.2 Data collection

The data for this study was collected through a series of tape-recorded *talanoa* sessions (refer section 3.3). The length of the *talanoa* sessions range from between 20 minutes and 75 minutes and were all conducted in Samoa. All except four of the sessions were tape-recorded. The four sessions that were not tape-recorded were at the request of the participants and in its place, written notes were taken. Most of the sessions (12) were carried out at the participants' place of work to accommodate their busy schedules. In each case, information regarding the purpose of the study was made available to the participant both verbally and in written form prior to the commencement of the *talanoa* session. In line with the conditions prescribed by the ethics committee, a signed consent form was received from each participant. Participants were also made aware of the purpose for the recording equipment and offered the option of not having the session tape-recorded.

Participants were given the option of having the *talanoa* session in either English or Samoan, as the researcher was fluent in both. For most participants, the *talanoa* sessions were conducted using both English and Samoan. It became obvious during the sessions that western accounting concepts were more clearly expressed in English while aspects of Samoan culture were better captured in the Samoan language.

Following the selection process described in section 2.4.1, participants were initially contacted by telephone to request an appointment. This was particularly challenging in the case of participants with whom the researcher had no prior relationship or contact. To overcome this problem, the researcher explained the purpose of the research and the significance of the contribution that they would be making to the ongoing development of the profession in Samoa. Many who were approached in this way, agreed to participate.

A number of participants were personally known to the researcher, either through the family or through previous research studies. In each case, these participants agreed to take part. On one occasion, involving a senior politician, the initial approach to secure an appointment was made by the researcher's family. This was done in recognition of the entrenched relationships (*va-fealoa'i*) that exist in Samoa. Three of the *talanoa* sessions, the initial request to participant was done face-to-face, in recognition of the *matai* titles that they held. In such circumstances, a telephone contact would have contradicted the Samoan cultural preference for face-to-face communication.

2.4.3 Conducting the *Talanoa* Sessions

The success of a *talanoa* session is based on securing trust between those participating and the researcher (Prescott, 2008). Where there is trust and a pre-existing relationship between members of a *talanoa* session, the exchange of ideas and knowledge is open and frank. It was necessary, during the *talanoa* sessions in this study, to establish this sense of trust before discussions regarding the topic of the research could be carried out.

A number of participants expressed anxiety over the subject of the research and the potential for the information to be misused. This anxiety was exacerbated by the fact that some of the information discussed was not in the public domain. The researcher was able to ease these fears by outlining the purpose of the research and the manner in which the information will be used. In particular, participants were assured anonymity and were also comforted by the researcher's ethnic ties to Samoa. Some went so far as to express their confidence that their views will be interpreted and reported in a manner that was culturally sensitive.

Many of the *talanoa* sessions attracted enthusiastic dialogue with the participants. This was partly attributable to the fact that many of the participants were accountants by profession and felt that the study would make a positive contribution towards alleviating the challenges that they currently face. The use of the Samoan language and the ethnicity and professional dress manner of the researcher, also contributed to the success of the *talanoa* sessions.

In acknowledgment of the high social status, seniority and professional background of the participants, the *talanoa* sessions were deliberately carried out in a formal manner. At the beginning of each session, formal salutations were made in a manner consistent with the honorifics as discussed in chapter 4. While the discussions during the sessions were less formal, each session was concluded with an acknowledgement in the Samoan language, as a mark of respect and gratitude to the participant. A gift was later sent to each participant as a further gesture of gratitude. This practice is consistent with traditional *fa'aSamoa*.

2.5 *Data Analysis*

The data analysis and discussion of the findings, was carried out in four stages. The first stage of the analysis was carried out during the *talanoa* sessions. The interactive nature of *talanoa* session, allowed both the researcher and the participant to reach an understanding of accountability and in particular the unique stance or view that they held. Each session began with the researcher introducing the topic and then encouraging discussion without the use of direct questions. This was done to avoid the *talanoa* session being misinterpreted as an interview or an interrogation.

The second stage in the analysis process involved transcribing the audio tapes or expanding on the notes taken during the *talanoa* sessions. The transcribing process involved faithfully writing down the views of the participants, where the English language was used. In situations where the dialogue was in the Samoan language, the transcribing and translating exercise were carried out simultaneously. However, where the researcher felt that the views being expressed were better captured in the Samoan language, the transcription included both the English and Samoan versions.

The third stage of the process involved going through each of the transcripts and summarising, on an excel worksheet, the key ideas and views discussed by each participant. Each key point was assigned a numerical code beginning with the number 1. By the end of the last transcript, a total of 145 key points had been noted. This sequence was then cross-referenced to the paper copy of the transcript, to allow for verification when quotes were used in the written discussion. On the same worksheet, the name of the participant, the professional group, date of the *talanoa* and theme code were also included. An extract of this worksheet is included below as table 2.5.2. For reasons of confidentiality, the actual name of the participants has been removed. The professional group code ranging from 1 to 5 are detailed in table 2.5.1.

Table 2.5.1: Summary of Groups

Group class	Group code
Auditors/Accountants	1
Politicians	2
Entrepreneur	3
Regulators	4
<i>Matais</i>	5

The theme codes in this study, representing stage 4 of the analysis; are a summary of the 145 key ideas and views expressed by the participants. Although these codes do not feature in the discussions, they were used to organise the structure of the discussions included in chapter 5. A key to the theme codes used is detailed in table 2.5.3.

Table 2.5.3: Discussion Themes

Theme code	Theme description
A	<i>Fa'aSamoa</i> and Accountability
B	Impact of Language
C	Implications for Auditors
D	Leadership and Accountability
E	Accounting Standards and Accountability
F	Conflict of Interest
G	Collective versus Individualism
H	Religion and Accountability
I	Some compromises of Western Accountability
J	Similarities between <i>fa'aSamoa</i> and western accountability

Table 2.5.2: Extract of Data Worksheet

Idea code	Name of Participant	Group	Idea/View	Talanoa Date	Theme Code
1	Name of Participant 1	1 & 2	Fa'aSamoa puts pressure on the implementation of Accounting standards	January 12, 2010	A
2	Name of Participant 1	1 & 2	Fa'aSamoa tends to interfere with Accountability systems	January 12, 2010	A
3	Name of Participant 1	1 & 2	the hierarchical social structure of fa'aSamoa influence Accountability	January 12, 2010	A
4	Name of Participant 1	1 & 2	fa'aaloalo influencing individual ability to be fully accountable for his/her actions	January 12, 2010	A
5	Name of Participant 1	1 & 2	fa'aaloalo discourages scrutiny which promotes harmony but allows for the incidents of fraud	January 12, 2010	B
6	Name of Participant 1	1 & 2	Good leaders are an important part of the Samoan society	January 12, 2010	D
7	Name of Participant 1	1 & 2	Collective accountability is aligned with the accounting standards where public monies are involved	January 12, 2010	G
8	Name of Participant 1	1 & 2	Matai system promotes collective accountability	January 12, 2010	G
9	Name of Participant 1	1 & 2	The accounting standards need to accommodate for the environment in which it is practiced in	January 12, 2010	E
10	Name of Participant 2	2	Fa'aaloalo has a negative influence on Accountability within the Accounting profession	January 11, 2010	A
11	Name of Participant 2	2	being a matai helps business	January 11, 2010	G
12	Name of Participant 2	2	traditional relationships seen as more important than individualistic commitments including employment	January 11, 2010	G-
13	Name of Participant 2	2	The matai system often add costs to businesses	January 11, 2010	G
14	Name of Participant 2	2	traditional relationships complement business success	January 11, 2010	A-
15	Name of Participant 2	2	religion and fa'asamoa - are inseparable	January 11, 2010	H

The coding theme adopted by the current study is consisted with that recommend by Silverman (2005), in terms of coding data according to some theoretical strands and then later examine how these themes interlink and therefore forms the main basis for discussions later on.

2.6 *Fusing Culture into the Research Design*

A critical feature leading to the success of this research study is its acknowledgement of Samoan culture and incorporating this into the research design. In particular the shared ethnicity between the researchers and participants, have contributed to the ease of access to the data and openness of the discussion (Merriam et al., 2001). Furthermore, the importance of relationships and building trust also contributed to the success of the *talanoa* sessions (Halapua, 2003; Spradley, 1979). Each *talanoa* session was carried out in either English or Samoan depending on the preference of the participant. As discussed in section 3.4.2, this offered both the participant and the researcher the opportunity to communicate complex accounting concepts and traditional notions of *fa'aSamoa* in the language they felt most appropriate. This is another example of incorporating *fa'aSamoa* into the research design. A further example of fusing *fa'aSamoa* into the research design, discussed in section 2.4.1, is the fact that, each of the *talanoa* sessions were carried out in Samoa. Lastly, the ethnicity, family background and reputation of the researcher, provided an assurance to participants that the information would be analysed and reported in a culturally sensitive manner (refer section 2.4.3).

2.7 *Saturation*

The number of participants (17) included in this study is the result of having reached saturation as discussed by Morse (2000). The in-depth nature of *talanoa* sessions provided a variety of perspectives on accountability and the accounting profession in Samoa. By the conclusion of the tenth *talanoa* session, there did not appear to be any additional views that were different to those already collected. This was from the perspective of the views and experiences but also based on the background of the participants. An additional four *talanoa* sessions were carried out, bringing the total to fourteen, in order to ensure that saturation had indeed been reached. Three participants, as discussed in section 2.4.1 are from the Samoan community and collectively represent saturation from that perspective.

CHAPTER 3: Accounting and Accountability – A Review of the Literature

3.1 *The meaning of Accountability*

The specific meaning of accountability is an elusive concept in the extant literature (Crofts, 2008; Sinclair, 1995). The extant literature supports the notion that the meaning of accountability is drawn from or specific to the context in which it is studied. Authors including Bovens (2007), Goodard (2005), Michels and Meijer (2008), Mulgan (2000, 2002), and Scarparo (2008) have examined accountability in terms of public accountability. The meaning that these authors adopt suggests accountability as an obligation to the general public or wider community. Public accountability has also been discussed within the context of higher education (G. Burke & Mckenzie, 1979; J. C. Burke, 2005; Chippendale, 1979; Massy, 2005; Shore & Wright, 2000). Specifically, academics are expected to be accountable to the government, other investors, interested parties and the public at large. These authors have discussed accountability in a broad context.

Balient, Schernbeck and Schneider (2008) suggest accountability to be more than a case of financial compliance, but a means of monitoring and measuring performance. Similarly Dunn and Halsall (2009) propose accountability in marketing may be used as a mechanism to encourage the achievement of performance-targets. The meaning that can be drawn from these studies suggests a narrower definition between parties within defined organisation such as a company.

A number of authors have identified that the meaning of accountability exists across a spectrum ranging from the broad to the specific. Sinclair (1995) provides a summary covering the various meanings of accountability discussed in the literature above. In particular she outlines accountability as existing in five forms including political, public, managerial, professional and personal. Her summary supports the notion that the meaning of accountability exists across a wide spectrum that ranges from the general in the case of political, to the specific as in the case of personal. This notion is support by Berry (2005)

who identified accountability in three parts including covenant, constitution and contractual.

Merriam-Webster offers a definition of accountability as “an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one’s actions” (cited in J. C. Burke, 2005, p. 2). Whilst this definition provides a general meaning of accountability, it fails to specify the participants and the accountability relationship that exists between them. The definition also fails to identify the nature of the obligation between the parties. Patton (1992) offers a more specific definition. He identifies that accountability exists where “one party (individual, group, company, government, organisation, etc.) is said to be directly or indirectly ‘accountable’ to another party for something, action, process output, or outcome” (p. 166). Laughlin (1990) argues that accountability has for many years had a financial focus. This has led to a narrower understanding of accountability. This narrower interpretation defines accountability as the obligation by managers to report the financial performance and position of the organisation to its shareholders (Alfredson et al., 2007).

3.2 Concepts of Accountability in different social settings

The specific meaning and scope of accountability is found to vary with the context in which it is applied. The extant literature reveals a variety of social settings in which accountability has been researched and discussed. These social settings include health, education (Agyemang, 2008; G. Burke & Mckenzie, 1979; J. C. Burke, 2005; Emanuel & Emanuel, 1996; Linn, 2000; Massy, 2005; Shore & Wright, 2000), government, marketing (Ezzamel & Willmott, 1993; Funnell & Cooper, 1998; A. Gray & Jenkins, 1993; Humphrey, Miller, & Scapens, 1993; Larmour, 2005; S Scarparo, 2008), religion and corporate social reporting (Berry, 2005; R Gray, Owen, & Maunders, 1988; Jacobs & Walker, 2004; Jayasinghe & Soobaroyen, 2009; Lerner & Tetlock, 1999). Berry (2005) concurs with this notion of accountability varying in different social settings and comments; “context and underlying structure do indeed play a large and dominant part in determining the nature of particular accountability relationships” (p. 112). The following discussions on accountability in its many social settings is aimed at bringing to the forefront of the debate

the variety of meanings that accountability can take and how this is influenced by the social setting.

Accountability is an integral part of Religion (Berry, 2005; Laughlin, 1990). Laughlin (1990) discuss accountability in relation to the Church of England. His findings support the notion that relationships are an important determinant for the existence of accountability. He identifies four levels of relationships that each translate to unique level of accountability. These relationships include those, i) between Christian followers and parishes, ii) between parishes and dioceses (the local governing bodies) , iii) between dioceses and the central governing board and iv) that between dioceses and the State and Church Commissioners (1990). Laughlin (1990) further adds that accountability in these relationships vary with the context in which they are applied. He writes:

The context of these four financial accountability relationships vary. The first three are based on voluntary ordering of actions and activities...which results in more communal, less structured, forms of accountability relationships. The fourth-the financial accountability relationship with the Church Commissioners-is rather more formal and ordered...resulting in formally defined, contractually bonded forms or accountability relationships (p. 103).

Berry (2005) shares a similar view, and argues that relationships in accountability exist at three levels including covenant, constitution and contract. Accountability at the covenant level entails a relationship between an individual and God regulated by embedded Christian faith. At the constitutional level, accountability means to give account according to legal requirements of the organisation and existing regulations. However, accountability at a contractual level refers to a specific contract or responsibility between two parties (Berry, 2005).

The extant literature has discussed accountability within the public sector, including health, education and government. This identifies two another level of accountability namely that of public and political. Within the social setting of public sectors, accountability is exercised in relationships between public servants and related stakeholders. This form of accountability suggests that there exists a line of responsibility between public servants and the general public. In particular, public accountability is defined by Sinclair (1995) as an; “informal but direct accountability to the public, interested community groups and individuals” (p. 225). Political accountability is a more specific form of public

accountability. In particular the lines of responsibility are defined between public servants and heads of government departments, parliamentary ministers, through to the general public.

In regard to education and health, accountability is based on the relationship that exists between academic and medical staff and stakeholders including, government, other fund providers, professional associations, external clients, supporters, and the public at large (J. C. Burke, 2005). For both these industries, much of the debate over accountability revolves around reporting on the effective use of public money to achieve education and health outcomes (G. Burke & Mckenzie, 1979; J. C. Burke, 2005; Massy, 2005; Shore & Wright, 2000).

In the context of corporate social reporting, Rob Gray, Owen and Adams (1996) define accountability as “the duty to provide an account (by no means necessarily a *financial* account) or reckoning of those actions for which one is held responsible” (p. 38). Accountability therefore exists as part of the relationships between directors and shareholders, that suggest shareholders have a right to information and thereby ensuring directors are accountable for their actions (Rob Gray et al., 1996).

The above literature outlines that the meaning of accountability is spread across a spectrum ranging from the very specific, as in the case of contractual and financial accountability, to the very broad, including collective and constitutional accountability (Berry, 2005). Patton (1992) shares this view and adds that accountability is more than reporting financials but to provide explanations about the context of the report. In Laughlin’s (1990) study, in relation to the Church of England, he acknowledges that, given the extensive variations in meaning of accountability due to the different social settings, it is difficult to articulate a precise definition and meaning. He writes; “the power and importance of understanding specific practices before we can make meaningful and workable prescriptions for future accountability relationships is also demonstrated” (p. 112). Lerner and Tetlock (1999) concur with this view and write:

It is, however, a mistake – and a rather common one – to view accountability as a unitary phenomenon. Even the simplest accountability manipulation necessarily implicates several empirically distinguishable sub-manipulations (p. 255).

For the purpose of this study, the meaning of accountability is confined to that associated with the accounting profession (Deegan, 2006). In particular financial accountability is characterized by the relationships that exist between business entities and their investors, and those who are connected to an organisation through a contract. The discussions in chapters 5 and 6 refer to this as western accountability. In particular, western accountability refers to the nature of accountability and its forms, as discussed earlier that exists at various levels of organisations, and in all disciplines including health and education and will later be discussed as, accountability in relation to accounting.

3.3 Accounting as a profession in different cultures

3.3.1 The Introduction of Accounting; Imperialism and Foreign Investments

The accounting profession has been studied in various countries. These countries include Australia (Chua & Poullaos, 2002; Gibson, 2000; Greer & Patel, 2000), Canada (Baylin, MacDonald, & Richardson, 1996; Neu, 2000a, 2000b; Neu & Graham, 2006), Fiji (Chand, 2005a, 2005b; Chand & White, 2007; Davie, 2000, 2001), Malaysia (Haniffa, 2006; Haniffa & Cooke, 2002; Susela, 1999), Philippines (Doty, 1993; Dyball, Chua, & Poullaos, 2006; Dyball, Poullaos, & Chua, 2007; Dyball & Valcarcel, 1999), Solomon Islands (Hauriasi & Davey, 2009) and Trinidad and Tobago (Annisette, 1999, 2000, 2003). In particular, these studies illustrate that accounting was introduced into these countries, initially through periods of imperialism and then through foreign investments and the establishment of Multinational companies in these countries.

Many of these countries, accounting, both as a profession and a practice, was introduced, initially through periods of annexation either by the United Kingdom (UK) or the United States of America (USA) (Annisette, 1999; Dyball et al., 2006). During these periods of imperialism, along with other western systems, governance and forms of regulations, accounting practice was imposed upon the colonies (S. J. Gray, 1988). In particular, this introduction of accounting, for many of these countries occurred during 1800s and early

1900s. In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, accounting was introduced during the British colonial periods from 1834 to 1844 (Annisette, 1999). For other British colonies including Malaysia (Ali, Haniffa, & Hudaib, 2006), Fiji (Chand, 2005a) and the Solomon Islands (Hauriasi & Davey, 2009), accounting was introduced in the early 1900s. Accounting was also introduced in Philippines, in the same period, specifically between the periods of 1898 to 1924, by the USA (Dyball et al., 2006). As evident, the accounting systems that now exist in these countries are mere products of these periods of imperialism. This is consistent with Hauriasi and Harvey's (2009) study on Solomon Islands, whom stated that:

One of the common features of the accounting systems of developing countries including the Solomon Islands is that their systems are merely extensions of those that existed historically in western capitalistic countries, in particular, the UK, the USA and Australia. Typically these systems have been introduced either through colonial influences and/or powerful investors (p. 229)

Another pathway in which accounting systems were imposed onto various British colonies was through the establishment of multinational companies into each colony and through foreign investment. In accordance to Hove's study, as cited in (Chand, 2001), there are two circumstances in which accounting technology had been transferred from the head of the colony to its colonies. These include, colonies having no organised body of accounting policies in the first place, and that large amounts of capital of the colony were invested in businesses in the colonies, with the consequent ability of the investor to impose their own accounting practices on the business (Chand, 2001).

Multi-National companies, during periods of colonisation established operations in the respective colonies under their administration. This was evident in British former colonial countries including Trinidad and Tobago (Annisette, 1999), Fiji (Chand, 2001, 2005a) and Malaysia (Ali et al., 2006). In particular, with reference to Annisette's (1999) study in Trinidad and Tobago, the discovery of oil in 1907, and the sugar plantations attracted many international investors. In the case of Malaysia, the foreigners dominated the rubber and tin mining sector, in which by 1953, there were approximately 700 European-owned estates. These Europeans-owned estates continued to dominate Malaysia's capital markets for another 15years after independence (from the British) in 1957 (Ali et al., 2006). The dominating presence of these corporations in the economy of these two countries resulted in the colonies adopting the accounting systems that these corporations currently practice.

This is consistent with that found in studies on Fiji (Chand, 2001, 2005a). Chand (2005a) further adds;

The absence of any concrete form of accounting legislation and the fact that these subsidiaries had to disclose financial information as required by their parent entities led Fiji to adopt accounting principles prescribed by the former power, where the parent entities were domiciled...colonies in general were thus obliged to adopt a system even though it may not have been appropriate; almost all former colonies continue to follow accounting practices of their former rules...(p. 274).

As evident, the influence of colonial powers and the dominating presence of foreigner investors have largely impacted on the development of the accounting profession in these countries.

3.3.2 Accounting and culture

Accounting is not cultural free. The accounting profession and the practice of accounting are vulnerable to effects of culture. This link between accounting and culture has been extensively researched in many countries (Perera, 1994) and in particular, many developing countries (Brown & Tower, 2002; S. J. Gray, 1988). These studies focussed largely on culture as the influencing factor over accounting. Studies that have explored this link have been carried out in Malaysia (Haniffa, 2006) Indonesia, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, Jordan, Bangladesh, Iran (Askary, 2006), Lebanon (Baydoun & Willett, 1995), Trinidad and Tobago (Annisette, 1999, 2000) New Zealand (McNicholas, 2009), Australia (Chew & Greer, 1997; Gibson, 2000), Philippines (Dyball et al., 2006; Dyball & Valcarcel, 1999), Fiji (Chand, 2001) and the Solomon Islands (Hauriasi & Davey, 2009). Perera (1994) in support of this view, states that this link between accounting and culture has been a popular topic for journals and conferences, tracing back as far back as 1986 (Perera, 1994). Therefore this section aims to discuss culture as the influencing factor on the diversity in accounting practice that exists in each of these countries, with an aim to reveal the gap in the extant literature that the current study aims to contribute to.

The basis of many of the studies exploring the link between culture and accounting originate from Hofstede's (1984) work on cross-cultural research (Perera, 1994). Hofstede (1984) identified four main dimensions of culture including individualism versus

collectivism, large versus small power distance; strong versus weak uncertainty avoidance; and masculinity versus femininity. Gray (1988) expands on the application of these dimensions by discussing them in an accounting context. Specifically, Gray (1988) proposed a framework that comprise four main value dimensions including professionalism versus statutory control, uniformity versus flexibility, conservatism versus optimism and secrecy versus transparency. Although Gray acknowledges that further research will need to be carried out in terms of empirically testing the impact of culture on accounting, he did theorize that among the many influences, uncertainty avoidance and individualism are at the forefront. Using Gray's (1988) terminology, the impact of culture on accounting is largely explained by conservatism versus optimism (uncertainty avoidance) and professionalism versus statutory control (individualism).

Gray's (1988) conservatism versus optimism dimension argues that individuals have a "preference for a cautious approach to measurement so as to cope with the uncertainty of future events as opposed to a more optimistic, laissez-faire, risk-taking approach" (p. 8). This dimension is consistent with the prudence and conservatism principle contained within the financial accounting framework (Accountants, 2007). The professionalism versus statutory control dimension refers to individuals' preference towards having the flexibility to exercise professional judgement in place of a prescribed set of statutory regulations (S. J. Gray, 1988). This dimension is aligned with the principles versus rule-based accounting debate that contrasts the accounting regime of the United States (rules-based) to that in countries that follow International Financial Reporting Standards (IRFS) (principle-based) (Bennett, Bradbury, & Prangnell, 2006).

The cultural dimensions discussed by Gray (1988) and Hofstede (1984) have been argued as inadequate in so far as describing the impact of culture on accounting practice in the Middle-East. Baydoun and Willett's (1995) found that the "Hofstede-Gray framework" (pp. 88-89) failed to capture the relevance of accounting recording systems and the significance of disclosure in a Middle-East context. As a consequence, their framework failed to capture the impact of the cultural characteristics that are present in the case of Lebanon. Baydoun and Willett (1995) argued that:

In Lebanon, the question of the Islamic community is a case in point. Under Islam, the social order is close to collectivism and the rights of private ownership are ultimately subordinate to Allah. Consequently, the forms of presentation and

disclosure which are most applicable to a moderately individualistic society may not be so relevant to the kind of accountability required by the Islamic *Shari'a* (p. 89)

Baydoun and Willett's (1995) critique of Hofstede-Gray framework is supported by Hamid, Craig and Clarke's (1993) study on the influence of Islamic religion on accounting. In their study, they discovered that businesses based on self-interest and are profit oriented are contrary to Islamic culture. Specifically, the Islamic culture prohibits the charging of interest on borrowings as this is perceived as introducing an unacceptable speculative element to business activities (Hamid et al., 1993). This is contrary to a fundamental norm in western business practices, in which interest is charged on borrowings.

The findings of Baydoun and Willett (1995) are not shared by all countries aligned with the Islamic faith. Askary (2006) found that across 12 Islamic countries including Bahrain, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, only Iran was found to be positively correlated towards statutory control. Bangladesh, Oman and Qatar showed only moderate support towards statutory control while Pakistan, Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia were very much against it. These findings indicate that the collectivist characteristics shared by many Islamic countries, is not consistently reflected in the accounting profession within these countries.

These inconsistencies in characteristics between the Islamic countries and those of the accounting profession are also evident in non-Islamic countries. The values in which characterises the accounting profession and the accounting systems contrast with those values found in many countries in the Pacific. In particular, these countries include Philippines (Dyball et al., 2006; Dyball & Valcarcel, 1999), Australia (Chew & Greer, 1997; Gibson, 2000), Fiji (Chand, 2001) and the Solomon Islands (Hauriasi & Davey, 2009). Those values embedded in accounting are defined by Chand (2001) as values that;

... include a preference for independent professional judgment as opposed to statutory control. A preference for exercising professional judgement is consistent with a preference for individualism and subjectivity. This is what is found in the accounting systems of countries listed under British-American model (p. 10).

Furthermore, modern accounting notions are argued to encompass values including wealth, assets and income distribution, and also accumulation of economic goods. This notion upholds a preference for individualism, which is consistent with Chand's (2001) study. In

contrast, the societal values that characterises these countries, has a higher regard for collectivism instead. This view is shared by all four countries. In particular, Dyball and Valcarel's (2006) study in the Philippines illustrates a contrast between its traditional values and those found in accounting. More specifically these traditional values include bonds between individuals through their families and familial networks, a preference for relationships, and a high regard for reciprocity and support (2006; 1999).

A parallel theme was also found in the Australian Aboriginal society, whereby notions such as wisdom and kinship are regarded as wealth, and the need for shelter, food, social contract and spiritual enrichment are all provided for by their land. This ensured a high regard for reciprocal relationships through familial networks and such is the basis for living within such society (Chew & Greer, 1997; Gibson, 2000). Hauriasi and Harvery (2009) shares this view. They conclude that Solomon Islands' culture also upholds relationships, maintained through sharing and caring for each other (collectivism), and such culture, discourages competition (individualism) as it may distort harmony in communities. As evident, traditional values are vastly different and irreconcilable with those values in which accounting principles are based on. Despite these inconsistencies, these countries understudied here, have adopted accounting principles and have one way or another embraced the entrenched modern values associated with accounting. For some countries, forces of globalisation and influence of foreign investments and donor agencies including Asian Development Bank, which are hard to resist, were the driving forces for adopting accounting principles of that of the West.

3.3.3 Accounting as a tool: Positive results?

The introduction of western accounting systems to some developing countries has not always had positive results. Annisette (1999) found that in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, the introduction of the British accounting systems was done in such a way as to frustrate the natural development of the profession in response to local influences.

Different experiences in T&T were caused by the impact of economic, social, political, ideological factors. The 'plantation economy' explains the late ascendancy of accountancy in T&T and the case-like social structure rendered its professionalization an irrelevance (Annisette, 1999, p. 126).

Furthermore, Annisette (1999) argues that the sometimes hostile relationships in Britain which exist between members of different professional accounting bodies, was absent in the case of Trinidad and Tobago. Nobes (1998) acknowledges that the development of accountancy within a country needs to reflect the political, social and economic characteristics of that country. In the case of the Solomon Islands, Hauriasi and Davey (2009) found that the underlying principles of a Western accounting systems, including wealth maximisation, economic entity, time-based accounting controls, competition and efficiency contradicted the collective social framework evident in the Solomon Islands. Other studies that concur with this view include studies in Australia (Chew & Greer, 1997; Gibson, 2000), Philippines (Dyball et al., 2006; Dyball & Valcarcel, 1999), Fiji (Davie, 2000) and Canada (Neu, 2000a, 2000b; Neu & Graham, 2006). In particular, these studies argue that the introduction of accounting to has resulted in the disempowerment and alienation of indigenous people of these countries. More specifically, Gibson's (2000) study on Australia Aboriginals, states that:

accounting has been, and continues to be, an effective weapon in the disempowerment and dispossession of Australian Aboriginal people (p. 291).

Gibson (2000) further argues that accounting, is a technique that is mainly intended to achieve economic growth through notions of wealth, assets, transactions and economic goods. These values were foreign and unfamiliar to Australian Aboriginals, whose society is based on transactions, which are not financial, but are largely trades through exchanging of gifts, and relationships built upon caring for each other, and the principles of reciprocity. These social values are not accommodated for within the accounting paradigm (Gibson, 2000). This was also evident in Canada and Fiji (Davie, 2000; Neu, 2000a, 2000b; Neu & Graham, 2006) with the British using accounting techniques to perpetuate colonial policies with domination onto these countries.

Furthermore, a parallel theme was also evident in the Philippines (Dyball et al., 2006; Dyball & Valcarcel, 1999), however, accounting was imposed by the US government, as a technique, to determine financial competency of the Filipinos, which was a major determinant of whether or not Philippines should be granted Independency. Accounting and the introduction of money onto Philippines, introduces western modern values which were inconsistent to those values that characterises the society of Philippines, as with other

societies including Fiji and Solomon Islands. This determinant of financial competency was largely based on the assumption that Filipinos were familiar with concepts of financial transactions, recording of transactions, economic goods, the accounting of assets, and principles of accountability and distribution of income, which they were not. As a result, the US tried to institute a “US-style modern government while at the same time respecting Filipino traditions (so as to not to be too heavy-handed a power)” (Dyball et al., 2006, p. 70). Although an attempt to acknowledge the vast differences in culture was evident, the fact remains that, the introduction of accounting onto Philippines, as with these other countries, was done so in a manner that frustrate the norms in these societies and in extreme cases, led to disempowerment and dispossession of valuable belongings of indigenous people.

The above studies illustrate how the introduction of accounting onto these developing countries and Canada, did not always produce positive results. However, in saying that, these countries nevertheless adopted accounting and embraced with it western and modern values associated with accounting. This is so that they (countries) can keep up with the every changing forces of globalisation on their economies, and to satisfy foreign investors and other donor aid agencies that have great positive influence onto their capital markets.

Furthermore, the studies discussed earlier on outlined the impact of culture on the development of accounting within developing countries and countries outside the Western context (Islamic) are different. The application of the Hofstede-Gray framework, in many of these studies, highlights an inconsistency in the findings. While some authors identify statutory control as potentially dominant in societies based on collectivism (Baydoun & Willett, 1995), others found this was not widespread (Askary, 2006). The development of accountancy in many developing countries indicated a uniqueness that was driven by local influences (Annisette, 1999; Nobes, 1998).

In conclusion, these studies indicate that in order to explore the impact of culture on accountability under the accounting profession, it needs to be carried out using an ethnic specific context. Some of these studies discussed how accounting was used as a tool by the colonial powers during periods of annexation to transfer (with force) their western policies and regulations upon the colonies. However, this current study wish not to explore the same issue in the context of Samoa but nevertheless focus on the introduction of accounting

in Samoa and how this influence and change various forms of accountability within Samoa. Therefore current study builds on the existing literature using a Samoan ethnic setting and this is a further justification for the use of the naturalistic inquiry approach discussed in chapter 2.

3.4 *Accounting and Accountability*

Accounting has been defined in a number of ways, capturing the increasingly wide number of areas in which it has been applied. Carlon et al (2009) defined accounting as “the process of identifying, measuring, recording and communicating the economic transactions and events of a business operation” (p. 5). While this definition focuses on accounting as a process, it implies that the information provided and communicated is between two parties, the business and its stakeholders. Alfredson et al (2007) outline that accounting offers a mechanism for ensuring that business enterprises provide its investors and creditors with information to support their ongoing involvement in business. They suggest that:

A business enterprise that receives capital from investors and creditors or one of that is seeking new capital has an obligation to keep its capital providers informed about the entity’s performance, condition and prospects. In other words, the business is *accountable* to its investors and creditors. It is also accountable to others who provide resources or an environment in which to operate, such as employees, governments and the community at large. Making this information available in an accurate and understandable format is the role of financial accounting and reporting (Alfredson et al., 2007, p. 4)

Accountability refers to the direct or indirect obligation that one party has to fulfil some action process or output to another (Patton, 1992). In relation to accounting, accountability defines the relationship between actors in a commercial setting and how this influences the manner in which this obligation is carried out. Accounting as a discipline on the other hand, provides a mechanism and process for fulfilling this obligation. In particular, this form of accountability is referred to as western accountability in the sense that with relation to accounting, where it is an instrument that satisfies the relationships including, that exists between preparers and users of accounting information. The preparers are usually the accountants themselves, guided by the conceptual framework and International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), in which, accountability refers to the preparation and

disclosure of accounting information to satisfy all stakeholders to whom they are accountable to. Therefore, the term western accountability used here refers to both accountability to that of the west in which accounting originates from, and also the means of accountability in the accounting profession.

More specifically, within the financial accounting framework, the relationship between actors in a commercial context is assumed to be distant. However, the integrity of the financial market and cooperation between business entities and investors is essential to ensure the continued existence and viability of businesses and more generally the economy. While the preservation of the integrity of the financial market is entrenched in the financial accounting framework, the practice of accounting is influenced by the practitioners understanding of accountability.

This is because accountability has many different forms, many dimensions (Crofts, 2008) and its meaning therefore varies within the context in which it is applied. This research adopts a meaning of accountability by Deegan (2006) in which accountability means to take responsibility and to account for one's actions. More specifically in terms of financial reporting, accountability means to report reliable information to its relevant external parties (Hamilton & Black, 2000). With specific reference to accounting, accountability means to comply with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP). This dimension of accountability is consistent with that observed in western societies (Deegan & Samkin, 2006) where accountability means to comply with the law, and in this context, GAAP is the law. GAAP outlines the requirements for accountability, in the form of financial statements, that provide financial information to external users (Deegan & Samkin, 2006).

These prior studies have highlighted culture (in its different forms) as an obstacle to international harmonisation of accounting systems and practices. Embedded in many developing nations, is a culture where individuals have a preference to live in societies that are tightly knitted (collectivism), and where individuals act in the best interest of others in their community. However, accounting originates from a western society framework whereby individuals act in their own best interest (individualism) (Hofstede, 1984).

CHAPTER 4: Samoa – Overview and Background

Overview

Samoa is a small Pacific Island country with a total resident population of 188,359 people (Statistics Samoa, 2010). The official language is *Gagana Samoa* (Samoan). Samoa is located in the central South Pacific between latitudes 13 degrees 15' and 14 degrees 5' south and longitudes 171 degrees 20' and 172 degrees 50' west (Lay, Murrow, & Meleisea, 2000; Ward & Ashcroft, 1998). This location places Samoa within the heart of the imaginary Polynesian triangle formed by three Polynesian countries namely Hawai'i, Easter Island and New Zealand (Linkels, 1997). Samoa is therefore referred to in the Pacific as the 'cradle of Polynesia' or 'the heart of the Pacific' (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998; Linkels, 1997). There are ten main (known) islands of Samoa of which four are inhabited, encompassing a total land mass of 2,831 square kilometers (Lay et al., 2000). This land mass is made up of two main islands, Upolu and Savaii, and two smaller islands, Manono and Apolima. Upolu is the most populated of all Samoan Islands, encompassing 1,118 square kilometers, and it is also the main island where the capital Apia is located. Savai'i, the largest of all islands, encompasses 1,707 square kilometers and interestingly enough, to the west of Savai'i, is a village named Falealupo, known as the last village on earth. This is because, the international dateline runs down the horizon west of Falealupo and so when the sun sets here, it is the end of the day everywhere else on earth (Field, 2006). The two smaller islands, Manono and Apolima are in between the two main islands Upolu and Savai'i. The other known uninhabited islands, which are smaller islands that surround the main islands, include Fanuatapu, Namu'a, Nu'utele and Nu'usafee.

4.1 Historical Background

Samoa as a nation, as it is known now, is a product of its traditional culture, the *fa'aSamoa*, and the significant contribution from the west through the former colonial nations during periods of imperialism.

This chapter aims to discuss both the traditional culture underpinning *fa'a Samoa* since the beginning of time, and also discuss the manner in which the former colonial nations influenced Samoa during their era.

4.1.1 Pre-colonial periods: Origins of Samoa and the events leading up to Imperialism.

Samoa, since the beginning of time, encompasses both the Western and Eastern Islands. Meleisea (1987a) states that the two sources of knowledge about the past of Samoa and its origin includes the prehistory, and the other as 'oral history' referring to stories, songs, poems and genealogies passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Many philosophers have theorized that Samoans originated from Tonga (Field, 2006), while others, including Rev. Thomas Powell and Rev. George Pratt argued that Samoa, as with other Polynesian Islands, originated from Asia (Meleisea, 1987a). Field (2006), concurs and adds that the story of Samoa is the story of the Polynesians themselves. Prehistory "is the name given to the study of the past of human societies which have no written records of their past" (Meleisea, 1987a, p. 11). Pre-historians therefore use numerous scientific methods to obtain evidence to assist them to construct an idea of the economy, population, and customs of particular societies (Meleisea, 1987a). They then concluded that the Lapita pottery was transferred from New Guinea to Samoa between 1500 BC and the time of Christianity. Nevertheless, the Samoans argue that they did not originate from anywhere else other than Samoa. Meleisea (1987a) reveals an incident in which a Maori scholar Te Rangi, at his address was corrected by the audience whom said;

We thank you for your address. The rest of the Polynesians may have come from Asia, but the Samoans - No. The Samoans originated in Samoa (Meleisea, 1987a, p. 2).

A more detailed story of the origins of Samoa is clearly outlined in other studies including, Turner (1884), Pitt (1970), Meleisea (1987a), Kramer (1995) and partly in Field's (2006) study.

However, Samoa's, oral history, as with many other Pacific Island nations, is embedded within its people provides a more accurate account of whom and where they originate from. These oral histories of Samoa are mainly passed down from ancestors through word of mouth while some are found in forms of songs and poems. Therefore given this nature of Samoa and its lack of written records to account for the actual events that occurred years ago, this study seeks to make a contribution to the extant literature on Samoa, through documenting a historical background of Samoa, starting from the 18th century, through the 19th century in its colonial periods, right through to its independence day in 1962. Furthermore, this study aims to provide a context in which the findings and discussions later discussed in chapter five may be interpreted in.

The historical background of Samoa can be traced back as far as 1722 when it was first discovered by a Dutch navigator Jacob Roggeveen. From his experience, Roggeveen shared that the people of Samoa are

...harmless good sort of people and ever brisk and lively; for they treated each other with visible marks of civility, and had nothing in their behaviour that was wild and savage (Field, 2006, p. 16).

A number of years later, a French explorer, Louis de Bougainville discovered the islands of Samoa and like Roggeveen, he did not go ashore (Field, 2006; Meti, 2002). He did however witness Samoans in their canoes and named Samoa the Navigator Island. In 1787, two more French ships found Samoa. One ship, captained by Jean-Francois Perouse, and another named Astrolabe, under the command of Captain Vaisseau de Langle, arrived at Asau, on the island of Savai'i. Sailors from both ships along with Captain de Langle and Perouse went ashore to refill their water casks. However, according to Field (2006), unlike the Tahitians, another Pacific island, the Samoans did not delight in the presence of these sailors and crewmen on shore and also did not wish on any of their western possessions. These sailors were not greeted well by the locals or more specifically, they were met with a crowd of stone-throwing people. Despite this incident in Asau, these sailors decided to settle in Samoa, and this marked the beginning of western influence over Samoa.

As the years go by, the people of Samoa start to notice an increasing number of Europeans settling on their land and gradually starting to influence their way of life. The most distinct western influence on Samoa came with the arrival of an English missionary, Rev. John Williams, with the London Missionary Society, in August 1830 in the village of Sapapali'i, in Upolu (Field, 2006). Meleisea (1987a) concurs and adds that Rev. John Williams brought with him another European missionary named Charles Barff and eight teachers from Tahiti and Rarotonga on his ship named 'Messenger of Peace'. Together they journeyed to bring a message of peace and establish Christianity in Samoa. A later section will discuss Christianity more extensively. In between 1847 and 1861, Great Britain, Germany and the United States of America started arriving at the ports of Apia, in Upolu and established their agencies there (Meti, 2002). Upon the arrival of these three powers, the people of Samoa were governed by its traditional customs encompassing its *fa'aSamoa* and its traditional chiefly system referred to as *fa'a-matai* system.

However in 1872, the three powers decided to establish a Samoan Kingship, and by 1889, they appointed Malietoa Laupepa as the first king of Samoa (Meti, 2002). Samoa, until this time, has never had a king as it is believed that the only king of Samoa is *Tagaloa-a-lagi*. *Tagaloa-a-lagi* was believed to be the ultimate God who created the universe, earth and mankind (Meleisea, 1987a). Furthermore, an ancient descendant, a lady named Salamasina, was the only other God as she possessed all chiefly descent bloodlines and all important chiefly genealogies can be traced back to Salamasina. Nevertheless, a Kingship was established and Malietoa and his office formed a government, under the influence of the three powers, to govern the nation of Samoa. This was an attempt by the people of Samoa to form a state that would please the Europeans. As a result, along with the appointment of Malietoa Laupepa as King, caused conflicts between the people of Samoa and more civil wars were evident. These civil wars were between the Samoan leaders, whom disputed over whom should be king, as they believed that this appointment should be granted based on genealogies and chiefly bloodline ties (Meleisea, 1987a, 1987b). For these reasons, which will be extensively discussed later on, it caused civil wars amongst the leaders of Samoa, which mainly occurred at the village of Mulinu'u, which was then and now the headquarters for the government of Samoa.

However, this Kingship failed to maintain a system of government that worked for either its own people or the Europeans (Meti, 2002).

During this same period, a Commission was sent to Samoa, encompassing full authority from all three powers, and their purpose was to investigate the causes of civil wars that have continued to increase and therefore report back to the three powers. After a period of extensive investigation, the commission identified the establishment of a Samoan kingship as the main cause. Consequently, the three powers then recommend to leaders of Samoa at the time to abolish the kingship. And by this time, Malietoa Laupepa had passed away and his son Malietoa Tanumafili as his successor was the current king. Upon receiving the three powers recommendation, on the 10th June 1899, Malietoa Tanumafili resigned from his office and this provided, yet again, another opportunity for the three powers to obtain full control of Samoa (Meti, 2002; Field 2006). Following the abolition of Samoan kingship, with all authority now vested in the hands of the three powers, competition between these nations became increasingly fierce as they contest for full claims on Samoa.

In resolving this fierce competition, the three powers arrived at an agreement to avoid war over Samoa, and decided to divide up the islands of Samoa between themselves (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998; Linkels, 1997; Ward & Ashcroft, 1998). Great Britain withdrew all claims to Samoa, as they were already heavily involved with other Pacific island nations including Solomon Islands and Tonga, leaving Germany and the United States of America to divide up Samoa amongst themselves (Field, 2006; Kerslake, 2010; Meti, 2002). In a series of conventions, signed on the 16th February 1900 (Meti, 2002), it was agreed that the Eastern islands be placed under the control of the United States of America and the Western islands be placed under the control of Germany. To the present time, the Eastern Islands remains a territory of the United States and are known as American Samoa. The Western Islands were known as German Samoa during Germany's era, and then it was known as Western Samoa, but to the present time is now known as Samoa. From this point forward, all references to Samoa, refers to the nation formerly known as German Samoa or Western Samoa in which this study is focused on.

4.1.2 Colonial periods: The German era 1900-1914, and the Mandate under New Zealand Administration 1920-1946.

4.1.2.1 The German era 1900-1914

The German colony took effect immediately after the agreement was signed, and it lasted until the close of the First World War in 1914 (Kerslake, 2010; Meti, 2002). German's era was initially led by Governor Dr. Wilhelm Solf, whom on the 17th August 1900 addressed the people of Samoa in a speech which reads as follows:

Nobody has to rule in the country except the Governor...It is not the intention of the German Government to force you to adopt our morals and our customs; the Government has a regard for your old traditions and respects them in as far as they do not give offence and precepts of Christianity and the well being and safety of the single man. The government reposes the confidence in you that you are able to administer yourself under the supervision of the Governor, and there will be given such laws and ordinances as are to the best interests of the country and consonant, as far as possible, with your institutions (Meti, 2002, p.7).

This statement provided an understanding between the German government and the people of Samoa. However, this understanding did not last. A year later, Governor Solf forbade the Samoans from exercising a custom of local banishment. Local banishment is a penalty for whomever that does not uphold the customs of *fa'aSamoa*, or disobeys any rules lay out by the chiefs or misbehave in any way that does not fit with the traditions. These penalties were severe, to the extent that an individual in question is ostracized from his or her village and from the wider society, or in extreme cases they would be slaughtered (Polu, 2000). These were the customs that acted to self-govern the people of Samoa before the arrival of western influence. However, the arrival of Christianity with Rev. John Williams, Rev. Peter Turner and other missionaries (Gardner, 2006), and according to the Germans, this custom was unacceptable and was therefore abolished.

As the German administration governed the nation of Samoa at a national level, at the meantime, a system of district government was established encompassing a Samoan political organization encompassing representatives from all eleven districts, representing forty one constituencies (Le Tagaloa, 1992; So'o, 2007).

This district level system of government was called the *Fono-o-Faipule* (Council of District Representatives) (Meti, 2002). These changes made under the administration led by Governor Solf, were all in fact autocratic, and these channels of representatives were established mainly to serve German's motives and not necessarily the people of Samoa. Some Samoans challenged Governor Solf's administration and the manner it was conducted and this resulted in the birth of '*Mau a Pule*' led by an influential Chief named Namulauulu, whom was later exiled by Solf to Saipan, where he spent eight years (Kerslake, 2010; Meti, 2002). This '*Mau a Pule*' was an attempt by the Samoans to reinstate their independence and regain authority and control over its own country. However, unbeknown to them, the German administration was only the beginning of another forty eight years of annexation of Samoa by the West.

4.1.2.2 New Zealand Military Occupation 1914-1920 and League of Nation Mandate under New Zealand Administration 1920-1946.

At the break of World War I, the New Zealand Expeditionary Force arrived in Samoa on the 29th August 1914 and placed Samoa under military rule. This Force maintained much of the policies established during the German era but made amendments to some where appropriate. Some of these amendments include the German policy on local banishments. Although New Zealand's Force maintained this policy, they did however amend it to include a provision for deportation of Europeans in breach of customs or policies already in place, and in particular the Germans who did not have any Samoan affiliations. New Zealand's administrator was initially carried out by Robert Logan and other officers whom, unlike the Germans, had merely military backgrounds (hence the NZ Military Occupation).

This office assumed that, their success with Maoris, the natives of New Zealand was adequate experience to equip them on what is to come during this administration over Samoa (Kerslake, 2010; Meti, 2002). Evidently, they were completely wrong. This was further evident with the new policies introduced this period. These new changes include the ban of travelling by canoes or by boat, and curfews were enforced upon Samoan citizens from ten o'clock at night until six in the morning.

Movement from one village to another was also banned and some *matais* were deprived of their chiefly titles. These new changes, arguable according to Wendt (1965), arose from the introduction of liquor by the Europeans to Samoa, and in return, the Europeans demanded changes to traditions of Samoa, as discussed. These had significant implications upon the norms in which the people of Samoa were accustomed to and in which Governor Solf of Germany did not interfere with. Although there were incidents in which Governor Solf interfered with traditions, he did however respect *fa'aSamoa* and the traditions that have long existed in the country. And therefore left the Samoans to continue their traditions and the manner in which they see fit according to their embedded values and beliefs of *fa'aSamoa*. Robert Logan and his administration, however, without a doubt imposed significant influence over Samoa and it has one way or another altered Samoa's traditional customs and culture. In saying that, later on during this period, in 1919, a Treaty of Peace was signed at Versailles;

And amongst other things, Great Britain was granted jurisdiction over Samoa under a Class C Mandate to be administered by her Dominion of New Zealand. That moved Samoa from autocratic rule to a position where responsible institutions could gradually be introduced and developed to provide eventually accountable representations (Meti, 2002, p. 9).

This administration continued to introduce its western policies and regulations on Samoa, a nation whom are largely unfamiliar with traditions other than what they are accustomed to. In which according to many Samoans, it is a system that has worked for them and therefore do not understand the need for change (Meleisea, 1987b). However, the annexation of both Germany and now Great Britain, through New Zealand, and including traders and merchants continue to demand a lot more from Samoa. These demands include the provision of raw materials and land for plantations, but more importantly the cooperation of the Samoan citizens through honouring their rules. The supposedly ideas of economic development for Samoa was a rationale provided to them by the administration, but it was evident, like during the era of Germany, these actions were merely to accumulate wealth for their own benefit. Nevertheless, the people of Samoa continue to live each day under the dominating influence of New Zealand, while meanwhile the '*Mau a Pule*' or the Mau Movement was re-enacted as a means of resistance by the people of Samoa, towards the administration (Kerslake, 2010).

The Mau Movement marked the coming together of the people of Samoa along with the support of some Europeans including half-caste Samoan Europeans, in the likes of the copra merchant Olaf Nelson. The Mau Movement's main objective was for Samoa to regain its Independence from the colonial powers and to allow Samoa to self-govern its own nation based on their *fa'aSamoa* culture and their traditional authoritative system, the *fa'a-matai* chiefly system (Meleisea, 1987a). Meleisea (1987a) further adds that

The Mau was a rejection of external control and systematic change, an assertion of Samoan capacity for autonomy within the sphere of traditional authority and the expression of a belief that a system was capable of accommodating any changes desired by the Samoans (p. 154).

4.1.3 The Independent State of Samoa: 1962

New Zealand's administration lasted through to 1962 when Samoa became an independent state (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998). Samoa's independence is the result of years of protest for self-government through the Mau Movement and the drive to return control to its indigenous leaders. This drive for self-government was led by high chiefs of Samoa including Tupua Tamasese Lealofi III, and others. Vaai (1999) states that:

...attainment of independence for Samoa was the culmination of a struggle for recognition of indigenous authority that was nourished by a nationalist ideology of "Samoa mo Samoa" of "Samoa for the Samoans" (p. 5).

One of the key outcomes of the German and British administrations years was the introduction of western rules of law. These rules were imposed upon Samoa with little regard to the traditional authority that was represented by the *fa'amatai* of *matai* system. During the administration years from 1899 through to 1962, western rules of law became an entrenched part of Samoan society. These rules were so embedded in Samoa's legislative framework that following independence they were simply adopted without question. Meleisea (1987b) captured this casual adoption of western rules when she writes:

In such conflicts the fundamental question is the extent to which *faaSamoa* is compatible with the basic tenets of the 'rational-legal' authority on to which it has been grafted over the past eight six years...The Constitution

which was produced and adopted in 1962 left these issues to the Samoans to resolve but by accepting their constitution the Samoans also uncritically accepted the coexistence of a written body of Western law and unwritten uncodified body of customary procedures (Introduction, p. xiii).

The adoption of the western rules of law clashed with many of the un-codified customary protocols associated with *fa'aSamoa* (Meleisea, 1987b). Vaai (1999) highlights the conflict between western rules of law and customary protocols in the context of land and title disputes. In particular he points out that the land and titles courts are in need of review to better reflect the traditional value-base on which the *matai* system operates. Meleisea (1987b) points out that despite the land and titles courts being created to settle land disputes “in accordance with *fa'aSamoa* principles” (Introduction, p. xi) the outcome was to disregard these principles in favor of western rules. The sections to follow will discuss Samoa’s traditional system known as *fa'a-matai* (chiefs) system and discuss the Samoan culture; *fa'aSamoa* more extensively.

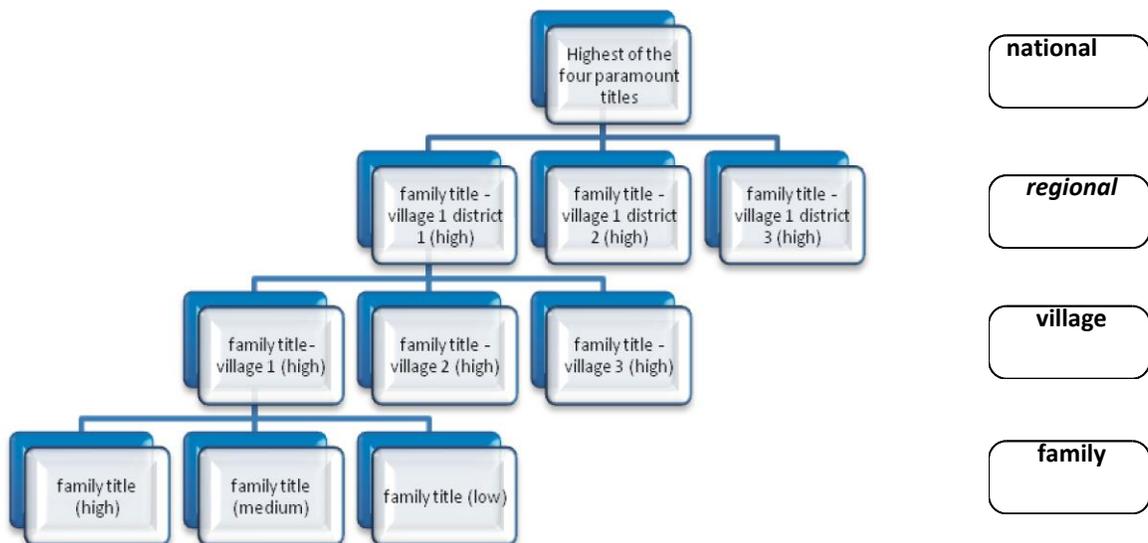
4.1.3.1 Traditional authority in Samoa: *Fa'a-matai* System

Fa'amatai is a traditional “chiefly system” (Suaali'i-Sauni, 2007, p. 35) that characterises Samoan society encompassing chiefs, their associates, and orators in a network of hierarchical ranks and customary rules. Le Tagaloa (1992) defines fa'amatai as “a social organisation of matai titles and the heirs of the matai titles, both male and female” (p. 117). This social structure ranks Samoans into five main groups including; the matais (chiefs), aualuma (daughters of the village), aumaga (untitled males), faletua ma tauisi (wives of the chiefs) and tamaiti (children) (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998). Le Tagaloa (1992) concurs with this meaning and adds that these five groups

...have been depicted in the form of a ‘sociometric wheel’ with the matai at the hub, or as circles that exist side by side and operate and inter-relate in concentric connections of blood ties and marital reciprocity” (p. 118).

The interrelation of the five groups within Samoan society is based on blood and marital ties. Fairbairn-Dunlop (1998) and Le Tagaloa (1992) describe *fa'a-matai* by placing the *matais* or the chiefs at the head of this social hierarchy. This parallels the structure of a typical Samoan extended family (*aigapotopoto*) which identifies the matai as the head of the family group. This same hierarchical structure is found at all levels of Samoan society including the family, village, and community, regional and national level (Suaali'i-Sauni, 2007; Vaai, 1999). The following diagram (figure 4.2) illustrates the multiple levels within which the fa'amatai system operates. At the very base of the hierarchy are the family titles, building up to the four paramount titles that exist at the national level.

Figure 4.2: *Fa'amatai* (Chiefly) System



Each family is attached to a *matai* title. The holder of the title at this level is chosen by the family based on traditional protocols. Each *matai* title, based on its chiefly bloodlines will vary in terms of rank from one another. At the village level, the highest ranking titleholder from among the family titles of the village becomes the representative of that village.

At the regional level the highest ranking titleholder from among the villages, becomes the representative of that region. At the national level there are four paramount matai titles from which the head of state is selected (Tuimaleali'ifano, 2006). According to Vaai (1999), these paramount titles include “but are not limited to titles such as Gatoaitete, Lilomaiava, Malietoa, Mataafa, Tagaloa of Safune, Tonumaipea, Tuiaana, Tuiatua, Tuimalealiifano, Tupua and Vaetamasoalii” (p. 30).

Matai titles exist at three levels including paramount chief, chief or orator titles. These titles are bestowed by the extended family to candidates that have blood ties to the title and have served the title, and these are honored and agreed upon by the village council and the extended community. These are the two core requirements by which *matai* titles are bestowed. These requirements are due to the fact that matai titles are owned by the *aigapotopoto* (extended family) and endorsed by a village or district (Pitt, 1970) (Le Tagaloa, 1992). The authority to bestow or to remove a title (if necessary) is a prerogative of the *aigapotopoto* and no-one else. Tamasese (2009) elaborates more on bestowment and entitlement of matai titles and states that

the standard measure for entitlement to a title is through *tautua*, i.e. regular service and merit. The common Samoan saying: *o le ala I le pule o le tautua* recognises the discourse of rights to Samoan custom and the implicit location of these rights in traditional notions of authority or *pule*. What is of significance here is that unlike a right to land, a right to title emphasises service or merit rather than genealogy or the reputation of biological antecedents (p. 160).

The bestowing of *matai* titles, although largely based on blood relations, is also influenced by the degree of service to the family and community by the potential recipient of the title. The acknowledgment of the service that titleholders have provided to the family or community is a demonstration of the collective accountability that is inherent in the *fa'amatai* and *fa'aSamoa*.

Vaai (1999) adds that a *matai* (chief) is the primary instrument of traditional authority in Samoa, in which they are leaders of families, villages, districts and the country as a whole. Their roles includes taking up leadership within the country by behaving in distinct manners and to maintain peace amongst the people of Samoa and having the vision to look beyond issues at hand and provide solutions in which these issues may be addressed (Vaai, 1999).

The *fa'a-matai* system described above exists at each level of the Samoan social hierarchy from the family, through to the national level. This complex network of titles is indicative of the collective accountability that exists in Samoa.

4.1.3.2 The Samoan culture (*Fa'aSamoa*): Relationships: Va - Fealoaloa'i

Samoa as with other Pacific Island nations has its own distinct culture and traditions, known as the *fa'aSamoa*. The term *fa'aSamoa* has been used extensively by researchers (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998; Field, 2006; Lay et al., 2000; Linkels, 1997; Macpherson, 2004; Meleisea, 1987a, 1987b; Mulitalo-Lauta, 2000; Pitt, 1970; Tamasese, 2009). Some authors have referred to *fa'aSamoa* simply as Samoan way or the typical Samoan way of life (Lay et al., 2000; Linkels, 1997; Machperson, 2004), while others (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998; Lawson, 1996; Mulitalo-Lauta, 2000; Pitt, 1970) have elaborated on this meaning and have defined *fa'aSamoa* as a system that encompasses the values, beliefs, customs and traditions of Samoans. Field (2006) however argues that Samoans were determined that they have a distinct culture and view of who they are which is best described as *fa'aSamoa*. Mulitalo-Lauta (2000) provides a definition of *fa'aSamoa* which is;

The total makeup of the Samoan culture, which comprises visible and invisible characteristics and in turn forms the basis of principles, values and beliefs that influence and control the behaviour and attitudes of Samoans. Fa'aSamoa is the 'umbilical cord' that attaches Samoans to their culture (p. 15)

Tamasese, as cited in Field's study (2006), further adds to this definition of *fa'aSamoa* and states that it is "a mental attitude to God...It is a distinctive lifestyle. It is not the physical make-up, the mood or passion of one man. It is the collection of spiritual and cultural values that motivates people...It is the heritage of people' (p.16). The meaning of *fa'aSamoa* stated above is a collective meaning of the term. The following section discusses *fa'aSamoa* more specifically under the three categories of relationships, social structure and religion.

Relationships, built on *fa'aaloalo* (respect) and *alofa* (love), are central to Samoan society. Tamasese (2009) writes, "*Alofa* and *fa'aaloalo* are the two critical values of our Samoan culture that are enacted in conversation that help to save or keep face" (p. 71). Preserving relationships is achieved through the adoption of the two values of *alofa* and *f'aaloalo*. *Fa'aaloalo* is most commonly referred to as respect but also captures the values of courtesy, politeness and pleasantness (Mulitalo-Lauta, 2000). Tamasese (2009) suggests a more in-depth meaning and states that "*fa'aaloalo* is *alo mai* and *alo atu*" (p. 71). The expression *alo mai* and *alo atu*, meaning do unto me and I will do unto you demonstrates the notion of reciprocity gifting that is predominant among many Pacific Island nations (Crocombe, 2001).

Here, the meaning of *fa'aaloalo* is taken or observed in a context of physical face-to-face contact (Tamasese, 2009). Tamasese (2009) suggests that individuals demonstrate a more transparent display of respect courtesy, politeness and pleasantness with one another when they are in a face-to-face situation. The implications of this notion in preserving relationships in Samoan society, is a preference for face-to-face contact and communication. This is consistent with the view of Brown, Tower and Taplin (2005) that Pacific Island people share a preference for oral and face-to-face communication. The face-to-face contact serves the dual role of providing a medium in which *fa'aaloalo* is shared and relationships are preserved.

Alofa, as the other critical component enacted in the Samoan culture, is commonly translated in English as love (Suaali'i-Sauni, 2007). *Alofa* is also referred to as compassion or charity (Mulitalo-Lauta, 2000). The term *alofa* suggests a meaning that encompasses ideas of not only love, charity and compassion, but also acts of caring, sacrifices, services and consideration, all of which are closely associated with *faaaloalo* (Suaali'i-Sauni, 2007).

The notion of *alofa* is such a central ingredient of Samoan society that the current Head of State, Tamasese, has indentified that “*fa’aSamoa* is founded on *alofa*” (Tamasese, 2009, p.52).

The strong relationships that exist across the multiple hierarchical levels of Samoan society are built on *fa’aaloalo* and *alofa*. In turn, the strength of these relationships supports the collective accountability that characterizes Samoan society and encourages, individuals identifying themselves as part of the extended family or community. Individuals therefore act in the best interest of the extended family and wider community (Canfield & Cunningham, 2004; Gough, 2006; Poasa, Mallinkckrodt, & Suzuki, 2000).

An example of the importance of relationships in Samoan society is that of *fa’alavelave*. *Fa’alavelave* has been described as a form of responsibility observed during events including funerals, weddings, birthdays and church festivals. Participants in these events are driven to gifting resources in the form of food, traditional crafts, time and money as a demonstration of their love and respect to those for whom the event is directed. In the case of a wedding, family members rally together to help by providing food, equipments and fine mats as a mark of respect and love and to honour both the wedding couple and their families. Tamasese (2009) captures this in relation to a traditional Samoan funeral and he writes:

In traditional Samoan funeral culture people present according to *sii alofa* (literally meaning, presenting out of love), the presentation is intended to share the burden of grief and expense (p.124).

4.1.3.3 Social structure

4.1.3.3.1 National – Political

Samoa’s social structure is a hybrid of traditional *fa’amatai* and western British colonialism (Larmour, 2005; Polu, 2000). The political structure is that of a parliamentary democracy with a single legislative chamber. There are forty nine members of parliament of which forty seven are chiefly titleholders and two non-titleholders who represent the non-Samoan portion of the population. Samoa is divided into eleven geographic districts.

These districts are further subdivided into forty one constituencies (Le Tagaloa, 1992; Meleisea, 1987a). Most constituencies are represented by a single member of parliament (*faipule*). The larger six constituencies including *A'ana Alofi No.1*, *Fa'asalele'aga No. 1*, *Vaimauga West*, *Safata*, *Falealili* and *Salega* each have two representatives (So'o, 2007).

Each of the forty seven members of Parliament are chiefly titleholders (Meleisea, 1987b). This is a requirement in order to be eligible to run for office. While titleholders from each district are entitled to run for parliament; only a few, and in some cases one will put their name forward as a candidate. The general election for members of parliament, takes place every five years. During each election round, candidates will normally pledge allegiance to either an existing political party or form a new one by combining with at least eight other candidates. Samoa uses the first past the post election regime. The government is therefore represented by the party with the greatest number of successful candidates.

The government, following each election, will appoint the Head of State for a term of five years. The founding constitution (1962) acknowledges two paramount titles including *Tupua Tamasese Meaole* and *Malietoa Tanumafili II* as joint Heads of State for life terms (Tuimaleali'ifano, 2006). Upon the death of both of these titleholders, subsequent Heads of State will be elected by parliament for a term of office of only five years. The Constitution however allows for an outgoing Head of State to stand for re-election ("The Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa," 2001).

The process for appointing the Head of State and the manner in which it is carried out provides an example of the Western democracy harmonizing with traditional protocols. The most recent constitution (2001) restricts the term of office of the Head of the State to five years compared with the indefinite term that had traditionally been observed. However, the reality for the current Head of State is that he is likely to hold the position for a longer term based on the respect that he's afforded as a *tama-a-aiga* (Paramount Title-Royal Sons) (Tuimaleali'ifano, 2006) and recognition of his ongoing service to the nation.

The preservation of the understanding that the Head of State be selected from among the four paramount chief titles or *tama-a-aiga* is reinforced by the traditional belief that any other blood line assuming this office will be ill-fated. This view is consistent with the outcome at the constitutional convention in the mid-1950s that concluded "that only *tama*'

āiga should only be eligible to hold the office of head of state” (Tuimaleali’ifano, 2006, p. 32).

4.1.3.3.2 Village – Family

The social structure of Samoa, at the village-family level, reflects the traditional hierarchical ranks that are entrenched within the *fa’aSamoa*. The village-family level represents the foundation of Samoa’s social hierarchy. This level is important for two reasons. Firstly, the majority of Samoans live within the village environment and secondly, because it is at this level that *fa’aSamoa* is most clearly observed. Vaai (1999) outlines that:

over ninety percent of Samoans live in the traditional village environment and those who live outside the village system continue to participate in cultural activities and are not completely divorced from the sphere of influence of *faamatai* (p.1).

The Samoan village is made up of a collection of families. Each of these families is connected to a village through their *faamatai* title and land holding. This is captured in the Samoan expression *fa’alupega* (honorific) meaning that the family or *matai* titles that are conferred on family members as a mark of recognition and respect, are uniquely identified with a particular village (Iati, 2007). This connection is non-transient in so far as members of a village are unable to relocate their title and settle elsewhere. Similarly, the practice of selling customary land (geographically attached to a village) with the prospect of relocating to another village is uncommon. As an illustration, the village of *Falefa* includes three senior *matai* titles, *Leutele*, *Lealaisalanoa* (*aiga sa Fenumu’uivao*) and *Alaiasa* (*aiga sa Alaiasa*). These titles pertain specifically to *Falefa* only, and not any other village in Samoa.

Each village is governed by a village *fono* (council) comprising of *matai* titleholders of the village, both chiefs and orators (Polu, 2000). The primary responsibilities of the village *fono* are to ensure harmony among the families within a village and coordinate the representation of the village at the district level. The leadership and responsibility at the family level largely remains with the family *matai* titleholder. Fairbairn-Dunlop (1998) writes:

At the centre of the *fa'amatai* was the family *matai*, who as family leader was expected to promote family unity and prestige, administer the family lands, settle disputes within the kin group, promote religious participation and act as political spokesperson for the family in meetings of the village *fono o matai* (p.6).

Meleisea (1987b) goes further to suggest that “*matai* are the trustee on behalf of their ‘*aiga* (extended family)” (Introduction, p. xiii). The role of *matai* at the family and village level is important for the preservation and continuity of Samoan society. It is also an illustration of the traditional accountability that promotes the collective interests of the village rather than the individual.

4.1.3.4 Economic

The economic status of Samoa is a product of both Western commercial practices and traditional forms of production and commerce. Economic development and wealth distribution has in turn had an impact on Samoa’s social structure. Pre-European, production and consumption were based on subsistence agriculture and a distribution network that is tied to the *fa'amatai* system. The administration of the resources and in particular land was the responsibility of the *matai* (titleholder). This traditional system of distribution and sharing ensured the sustainability of the village and reinforced the entrenched relationships between its members.

Pitt (1970) suggests that wealth is associated with the “rewards of high status” (p.68). This should however not be interpreted to mean that individuals who are wealthy are automatically elevated to the status of a *matai*. *Matai* titles are conferred, not only based on blood line, but on service to the *aiga* and community. In this sense prospective titleholders who are in a position of wealth are often in a stronger position to demonstrate service to the community. Conferment of *matai* titles to individuals who are in a position of wealth should therefore not be seen as a case of bestowing honor on the rich but recognition of how they have used their wealth to benefit the wider community.

The Post-European era beginning with the influence of Germany and United States in 1899 and Britain from 1920 significantly contributed to the economic development of Samoa. In

particular these contributions included the introduction of money as a medium of exchange, specialization of labor, retail networks and a range of European goods (Pitt, 1970). While these contributions have shaped the economic infrastructure of Samoa, it has not significantly compromised the traditional systems of distribution and sharing that existed before their introduction. As an example, a *lafo or tofā*, a gift given to dignitaries in honoring their presence have recently taken on the form of money in addition to the usual traditional fine mats.

The economic influence of the West, although significant in terms of the economic development of Samoa has had little impact on the traditional values that are captured by the notion of *fa'a-Samoa*. Croulet and Sio (1986) argue that “the basis of the village economy appears to have changed little from what it was in the 1880s when the reliance was on taro, breadfruit, bananas, coconut, yams and fishing” (p.16). Furthermore, Meleisea (1987b) outlines that approximately 83% of the total land area of Samoa is held under customary tenure. This would suggest that while Western models of production based on individualistic accountability were introduced as early as the 1900s, Samoa has demonstrated significant resistance and continues to follow a collective form of accountability based on the *matai* system.

4.1.3.5 Religion

In the previous three sections, the social structure of Samoa has been discussed in terms of national-political, village-family and economics. This section discusses the influence of religion and in particular Christianity principles on the current structure of Samoan society.

Christianity was introduced to Samoa with the arrival of Rev. John Williams in 1830 as part of the London Missionary Society (LMS) (Field, 2006; Gardner, 2006; Saada, 2008). Other denominations of the Christian faith were introduced in the years that followed including the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society in 1835 and Catholicism in 1845 (Anae, 1998). These Christian faiths encompass many of the underlying principles and values of the West. This has had a significant impact on the present structure of Samoan society and

influenced the way many traditional protocols are carried out. By the same token *fa'aSamoa* has also influenced the practice of Christianity.

Christianity was largely embraced by Samoan society as many of its principles aligned with those that already existed in Samoa. The notions of love, compassion, sharing and fellowship reinforced the entrenched relationships and principles of *fa'aSamoa*. As an example the great commandment in the gospel of Mathew 22: 37-38, is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind (and to) love your neighbours as yourself” aligns with the *fa'aSamoa* values of *alofa* (love) and *fa'aaloalo* (respect). Differences between *fa'aSamoa* and Christianity, has resulted in either a shift in cultural protocols to reflect Christian values or a change to Christian practices to accommodate *fa'a-Samoa*. An illustration of this is observed in the traditional *vaevaega* (allocation) of a fishing catch. Traditionally the head of the fish has symbolic significance and is allocated to high ranking *matai* titles. More recently with the introduction of Christianity, the pastor (minister of the church) is now included among those who receive the head of the fish during such ceremonial allocations. Similarly, Christian practices in Samoa have been shaped to accommodate *fa'a-Samoa*. Anae (1998) supports this and writes:

It was clear that a fully developed movement by Samoans towards Samoan control took place. This movement, which included the firm establishment of the pastors in the villages, the conversion of the office of church minister into another ‘sacred chief’, and a moulding of the practices and doctrines of Christianity to traditional values and beliefs, was to prove permanent, and a conservative influence in Samoa village life (p. 90).

As an illustration, the offertory during a Catholic mass traditionally included the presentation of bread and wine at the Eucharist. During a Samoan mass, the traditional offertory of bread and wine is accompanied by other gifts including fine mats, food and money. Furthermore the presentation of these gifts is accompanied by a Samoan *siva* (dance) performed by a *taupou* (young virgin) in the same manner that gifts are presented to *matai*.



Figure 4.3.3: Mulivai Catholic Church, in Apia; where several Samoan masses as described above took place.

As with the *matai* system, religion is found at all levels of Samoa's social hierarchy (So'o, 2005). At the village level the presence of the church is most clearly displayed by the number of church buildings and adjoining residences for the ministers or pastors (Kramer, 1995). The embracing of the Christian faith saw each village in Samoa establishing a church and an adjacent home for the pastor. In some villages, where more than one denomination of the Christian faith was followed, the process of establishing a church and residence for the pastor was repeated. Cote (1997) sees this as a demonstration of the successful conversion of the Samoan people to Christianity. He writes, "the missionaries ultimately succeeded in converting Samoans to a form of Christianity – the hundreds of churches that are the centre of communities throughout the islands are a testimony to this success" (Cote, 1997, p. 223). At the national level reference to Religion and Christianity is found in "*O le Faavae o le Malo Tutoatasi o Samoa*" (The Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa). The preamble of the Samoan Constitution contains the following declaration:

In the Holy name of God, the Almighty, the ever loving whereas sovereignty over the Universe belongs to the Omni-present God alone, and the authority to be exercised by the people of Samoa within the limits prescribed by His commandments is a sacred heritage; whereas the Leaders of Samoa have

declared that Samoa should be an Independent State based on Christian principles and Samoan custom and traditions ("The Constitution of the Independent State of Samoa," 2001, p. 4).

The introduction of Christianity (religion) has superimposed another layer of authority onto Samoa's social network. This additional layer transcends family, village and district boundaries in a way that *matai* titles were unable to. Individuals and families within a village setting were provided with a new avenue within which to interact with other members of Samoan society beyond those of the traditional *matai* and family lines. Furthermore priests, pastors and ministers of the church began to be regarded as 'ao *fa'alupega*' meaning, a rank higher than *matais*.

The practice of religion is an entrenched part of the Samoan village lifestyle and attracts participation from the majority of Samoans (Lawson, 1996). According to the Across International Ministries (2010), more than 95% of Samoans attend church. Furthermore, the influence of Christianity within villages has led village councils to establish a daily curfew that is usually observed between 6pm and 7pm to allow for family *faigalotu* (evening prayers). These curfews are a clear demonstration of the co-existence of Western Christianity and traditional *fa'aSamoa*. Where members of the village have breached curfew, the village council is tasked with the responsibility of sanctioning those involved. Although these sanctions are normally administered with a degree of leniency, a number of cases demonstrate the serious regard village elders have for the curfew. An example as outlined by Polu (2000) in the village of *Lona (Fagaloa)* he writes:

The last straw for Mafulu came a few days later when an untitled man went to ring the bell (an empty cylinder) that hangs on a breadfruit tree on Mafulu's land. The bell is rung every evening to indicate the curfew – prayers and meditation time. Mafulu chased the young untitled man away, who informed the village council immediately. The council felt offended and called an urgent meeting, and, in a few hours, decided to destroy Mafulu's property (p. 60).

The integration of Religion (Christianity) and Samoan society has largely been a harmonious and successful exercise. Over the past 100 years, Christianity has become such an entrenched part of the Samoan social structure that they are regarded as being

inseparable. The inseparable and fused nature of this integration is captured in the popular Samoan proverb, “*E Fa’avae I le Atua Samoa*”, meaning that Samoa is founded on God.

CHAPTER 5: Findings & Discussion

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from this research in the context of providing an answer to the broad research question. The findings have been broken up into nine sections. Section 5.2 explores the drivers which have encouraged or discouraged the adoption of western accountability. Section 5.3 through to 5.7 provide further discussions in line with answering the research question and is separated into specific headings in order to capture the themes that have emerged from the *talanoa* sessions. Sections 5.8 and 5.9 have been included to convey the experiences of four participants who offered views as to how western accountability and *fa'aSamoa* may coexist harmoniously for the benefit of Samoa as a country.

5.1 Collective versus Individualistic Accountability; the Pros and Cons

This section discusses the development of the accounting profession in Samoa and the adoption of western accountability. The discussion begins with the drivers of western accountability and concludes that its merging with the Samoan culture (*fa'aSamoa*) is inevitable. Part two of this section discusses those factors which have acted to frustrate the adoption of western accountability by drawing of the core characteristics of *fa'aSamoa* including entrenched relationships, the essence of sharing and focus on the event.

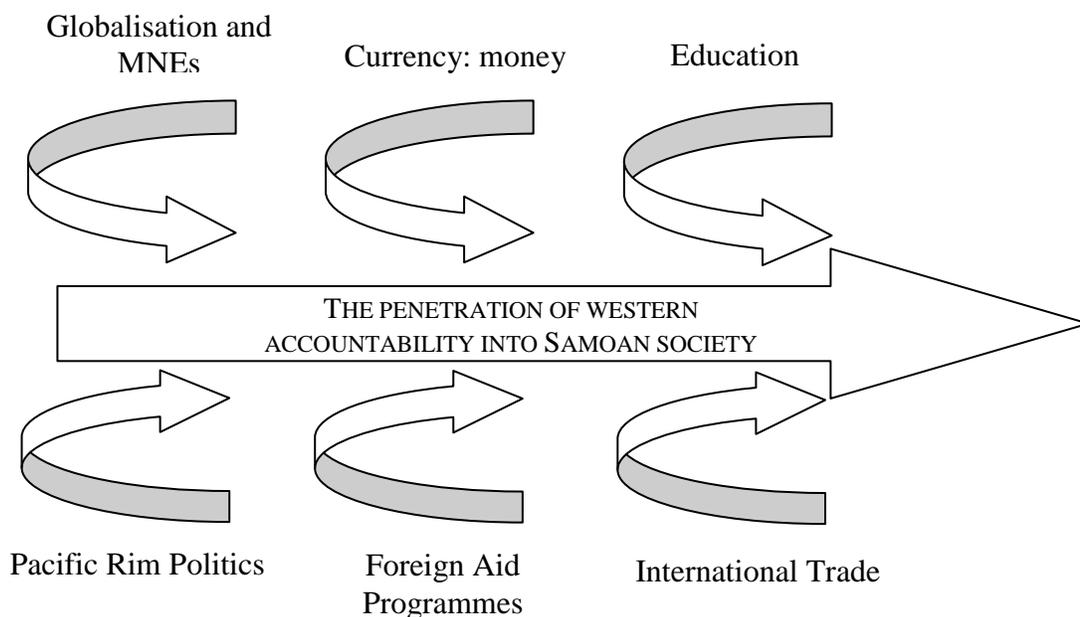
5.1.1 Drivers of Western Accountability

The practice of accounting in Samoa is carried out against a background of both collective and individualistic accountability. The individualistic component is a product of the western accounting standards that has been adopted since the days of colonisation. The collectivist culture of Samoa is the result of over 3,000 years of social development. The co-existence of these two paradigms has had a significant influence on the practice of

accounting and the development of the profession in Samoa. The following section discusses the interaction between the two and the implications, both positive and negative, that they have had on accountability.

The accounting profession in Samoa has become an important part of the commercial infrastructure of Samoa. A number of factors have acted to encourage the adoption of western accounting practices including globalisation and multinational companies, Pacific Rim politics, foreign aid programmes, international trade, currency, education and migration. This is illustrated in Diagram 5.2.1 below.

Diagram 5.2.1: Drivers of Western Accountability



5.1.1.1 Globalisation and multinational companies

Globalisation and the spread of multinational companies have reached the South Pacific including Samoa (Lautensach, 2005). Multinational companies, including Digicel Group Ltd, British American Tobacco, Yazaki, McDonalds, Western Union, ANZ and Westpac Banks have all established branch operations in Samoa. Each of these companies have maintained their western accounting practices of financial reporting and encouraged the development of the accounting profession. Furthermore their aim to generate profit

introduced a level of accountability that was narrower and more clearly defined than that currently in existence.

Local companies in Samoa, seeking to access international funding channels needed to align their financial reporting to that of the west. Nobes (1998) argues that investments from other countries leads to “accountants and accounting migrating together with capital” (p. 170). This is one way the accounting practices of the west have been introduced to Samoa. Furthermore Samoan businesses wishing to access foreign capital markets are obliged to satisfy the credit criteria of the west. These credit criteria included assessing the financial performance and position of individuals or businesses applying for funds. Such a measure is based on western financial reporting systems and represents a shift away from reputation based on traditional social status towards individualistic financial credibility. Determining an individual’s or companies’ financial status relied heavily on the reporting framework of the profession. This in turn encouraged the adoption of western accounting standards and principles of western accountability.

5.1.1.2 Pacific Rim politics

Since the early years of colonisation (circa 1908), western political systems have slowly infiltrated Samoa’s political processes. The current political system is a hybrid of western democracy and traditional *fa’amatai* (Larmour, 2005; Polu, 2000). As in the case of many western countries, financial accountability is an integral part of the government sector. In the case of Samoa, financial accountability has been increasingly introduced at all levels. Participant 11, an entrepreneur, comments that, “in terms of accountability where you account to the last cent...that’s where the government is now heading” (110). He outlines that this was first carried out with private companies, extending to government administration and now to be found across all parliamentary groups. Reporting frameworks common to western public sector reporting are now part of the reporting mechanisms within Samoa’s public sector.

The political structure of many Island nations of the South Pacific, have been influenced by its historical allies New Zealand, Australia and the United States. In recent decades, political unrest in Fiji has attracted pressure from both Australia and New Zealand in favour of democratic rule. While this has been regarded as part of a regional political agenda, it

inadvertently encourages western accountability at the national level. This form of western accountability has the follow-on impact of nurturing the adoption of western accounting practices.

5.1.1.3 Foreign Aid Programmes

Many island nations, including Samoa are the recipients of foreign aid from countries including New Zealand and Australia (Larmour, 2005; Lautensach, 2005). In recent decades donor countries have insisted on a greater level of financial accountability. Foreign aid arrangements are now channelled towards specific projects and thereby reducing the discretion of the recipient government. Participant 12, a regulator, comments that foreign assistance programmes including foreign aid have pushed for greater internal controls and accountability. He says:

There have been so many misappropriations of funds due to weak internal controls or non-existent. Management and governments have recognised this and aid donors are much happier now that they can see that accountability and the checking of accountability now exist (132).

Foreign aid programmes in Samoa have not only introduced much needed financial assistance but a level of accountability that is aligned to the western accounting profession (Macpherson & Macpherson, 2000).

5.1.1.4 The influence of international trade on accountability

International trade in Samoa has grown to such an extent that approximately one third of the country's aggregate demand (approximately \$388 million in 2009) is imported. Samoa's top two trading partners include Australia and New Zealand who together represent two thirds of Samoa's annual aggregate trade value. This level of commercial interaction between Samoa and its trading partners, Australia and New Zealand, have encouraged the adoption, by Samoa, of the accounting practices of these countries. In particular, Samoa's accounting practice, based on IFRS, is the same as that for Australia and New Zealand (Haribhakti, 2008).

5.1.1.5 Currency and accountability

The introduction of western currency to Samoa, has contributed to the development of accounting and adoption of western accountability principles. The use of currency to effect commercial transactions allowed for a more precise way of measuring the value of these exchanges. In many customary events, including *fa'alavelave* (for example weddings and funerals), currency is used to supplement the traditional crafts including fine mats (*ie-toga*) and food, and in some cases replace it all together. Participants 3 (regulator) and 9 (an accountant), discuss the increasing use of money during these events. An outcome of this shifting practice is the increasing demand for precise reports on the amounts collected and disbursed. Participant 12 (regulator) explains this phenomenon as follows:

In most extended families nowadays, they now sit down together after *fa'alavelaves* and whoever is responsible will then sit down and explain to the family what was inputted and how much was spent and where and when...more and more Samoan families now account back to the family of how the funds were distributed and used (137).

5.1.1.6 Education

Western education has contributed positively to the spread of the accounting profession and financial accountability in Samoa. Helu-Thaman (1995) describes how the spread of education has become a vehicle for introducing western concepts to the Pacific and replacing traditional culture. She writes:

Contemporary education, from primary to tertiary, continues to be mainly concerned with training the people of Oceania for a career in the urban industrial sector or, more generally, in the cash economy. It is not concerned with cultural development. This has several consequences. One is urban drift: primary school-leavers desert the villages for the towns, secondary school-leavers move to the capital cities to find work, and graduates from tertiary institutions choose to use their new-found skills in metropolitan countries. Instead of providing our societies with a means of cultural renewal, formal education is providing them with a means of assuring cultural demise (Helu-Thaman, 1995, p. 724).

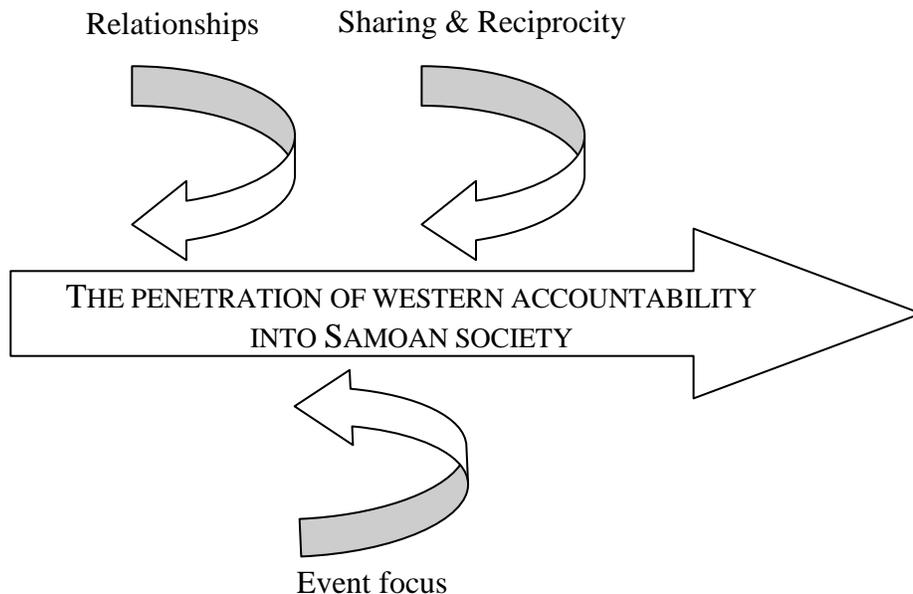
This pattern has been observed occurring in Samoa. Macpherson and Macpherson (2000) comment that the establishment of the National University of Samoa has given rise to a group of professionally trained individuals who have become articulate critics and

advocates of western models of governance. They also identify that many of these educated professionals received their training abroad (western) and have adopted the accountability models of the west. This observation is shared by participant 14, whom is an accountant, identifies the increasing number of foreign trained professionals who demonstrates a greater focus for western accountability than that of traditional Samoan culture. Participant 12 (regulator) goes further to argue that western accountability is not merely a bi-product of education but is entirely dependent on it. He notes, “It really has been a case of education, making people aware of their responsibilities and not trying to hide behind the cultural issues” (125).

5.1.2 Obstacles to Western Accountability

In contrast to section 5.2.1, this section discusses those factors which have hindered the adoption of western accountability and the development of the accounting profession in Samoa. The three factors identified in this section, including relationships, sharing and reciprocity and focus on the event are characteristics of *fa'aSamoa*. Diagram 5.2.2 is an illustration of the penetration that western accountability has had into Samoan society with the three factors working in the opposite direction.

Diagram 5.2.2: Obstacles to Western Accountability



The collective form of accountability that is found in Samoa and discussed in chapter 4 is similar to that referred to by Balient, Schernbeck and Schenider (Balient et al., 2008) in so far as indentifying that accountability is a wider concept than financial accountability. Furthermore, the findings of Baydoun and Willett (1995) in relation to the inconsistencies between Islamic countries and western accountability, appear to be consistent with the experiences found in Samoa.

5.1.2.1 Entrenched Relationships – *Fa’aaloalo* (respect) and *Alofa* (love)

Samoa’s social structure is made up of an entrenched network of relationships that extends horizontally across family groups, and vertically from family unit to the national level. These relationships have largely frustrated the adoption of western principles of accountability and the adherence to western accounting standards. Participant 10, an auditor, suggests that in the case of Parliamentary Ministers, Samoan culture has limited the degree of accountability that would otherwise exist. He comments:

With regards to these cases, involving (parliamentary) ministers, the influence of the Samoan culture is mainly in the sense that it inhibits/restrains individuals, or those who need to speak to up about these issues, because of the *va-fealoa’i* (relationships) (88).

Participants 1 and 2, whom are both auditors, suggest that *fa’aaloalo* (respect) has the impact of reducing individual accountability. Participant 1 writes that individuals are reluctant to ask questions, even when they suspect something may be in error. He says:

Our culture is about *fa’aaloalo* – about respect and on the face of it not wanting to argue things. Even if you know that it’s the wrong thing to do, I go to the village council meetings and you know that they know, it’s the wrong thing – but they don’t want to say anything about it. That’s the impact of culture, where people don’t want to argue things and rock the boat (4).

A number of participants (1, 4, 6, 10 and 12) have indentified *fa’aSamoa* as more than an obstacle to western accountability but as an excuse to cover-up alleged fraudulent behaviour. When considering the entrenched nature of the relationships that exist in Samoan society, this view is unfounded and demonstrates a lack of appreciation of the existence and importance of *fa’aSamoa*. As an example, parliamentary ministers attending

the launch of a service or opening of a building are traditionally obliged to make a gift to the organisation in question. These gifts can vary in size, depending on the occasion and have been the subject of fraudulent scrutiny by accountants (Larmour, 2005; Macpherson & Macpherson, 2000). Participant 9, an accountant, explains that people who do not understand the Samoan culture are inclined to use it as an excuse for the tensions that arise between western (individual) and collective accountability. She notes:

In the Samoan culture, when you give something, you're not expected to get anything in return and that should be stressed. I think some people that are not culturally-based, go to things expecting to receive something in return. But not in the true essence of the Samoan culture. You give something to someone because you truly want to help them out... I think the culture is there to support every Samoan, like the extended family network and it's not there to pull you down (79).

5.1.2.2 Traditional Sharing and Reciprocity

Traditional sharing and reciprocity is an integral part of *fa'a Samoa* which demonstrates a form of collective accountability (Larmour, 2005). This form of accountability, which acts to self-regulate Samoan society, hinders full adoption of western accountability and the accounting standards. Macpherson and Macpherson (2000) argues that traditional sharing and reciprocity entails exchanges between parties, with an understanding that the favour (repaying the informal debt) will be reciprocated in the future. As an example, during a traditional Samoan *fa'alavelave*, members of the extended family, friends or members of the community contribute resources including supplies of canned meat and fish, fine mats and money, to assist the family with the *fa'alavelave*. Participant 9 shares this view and comments:

The Samoan culture is full of giving... whenever you have a family *fa'alavelave*, usually the *fa'alavelave* will fund itself. Because people (Samoans) are very giving, they would come with so many contributions and assistance and if you use that money or whatever that's given to fund or whatever you needed in your *fa'alavelave* – you'll end up with a very small loss (67).

The success of traditional family *fa'alavelaves* relies on the pooled effort of the extended family and community. The close knit nature of the extended family and community together with their social sense of identity fosters the continuance of this traditional sharing

and sense of collective accountability. Participant 9 identifies that traditional sharing driven by sense of duty towards the collective good of the community and village ensures that resources continue to circulate.

Crocombe (2001) suggests that for many Pacific Island nations, the so-called “Pacific Way” describes Pacific Island people’s attitude and ranking of individual and collective responsibilities. He suggests that Pacific Island people give priority to extensive kinship networks and spend high proportions of their time and resource on ceremonial events and less on work (employment) time and output (Crocombe, 2001). This observation has been found to exist in Samoa. Participant 2 supports this notion and explains its existence in the case of traditional *fa’alavelave*. He explains that Samoans will enthusiastically commit to carrying out the often time consuming chores during ceremonial events at the cost of their individual responsibilities. He comments that, “the...thing about Samoan culture is the tendency (in my view), that if you have a *fa’alavelave*...it’s an obligation that takes precedence over your normal working obligations (12)”.

5.1.2.3 Event focus – *Fa’alavelave*

Fa’alavelave is a central aspect of the Samoan culture and refers to the activities carried out during ceremonial and traditional events including funerals, weddings and church functions. *Fa’alavelave* is therefore always associated with an event. The extension of the *fa’alavelave* tradition in Samoa is the focus on the success or failure of the event rather than specific monetary cost and benefits associated with western accountability. Crocombe (2001) suggests that Pacific Island people place “emphasis on distribution and consumption...on ceremonies associated with initiation, marriage, death, accession to chiefly titles and other community events” (p. 159). Samoan people share this notion of focusing on the event, as evidenced by the *fa’alavelave* tradition. Participants 1, 2, 7 (an accountant, 11 (an entrepreneur) and 12, share the common view that *fa’alavelave* and in particular the manner in which it is carried out is contrary to western accountability. The event focus that Samoan people share at all levels of its complex social hierarchy hinders acceptance of western forms of accountability. Participant 1 (an auditor) concurs with this view and comments:

Unless you're very very professional, and you want to keep your standards, you will be affected after a long time living in an environment like this, the fa'aSamoa.

5.2 *Conflict of Interest*

Conflict of interest is defined as a “process which begins when one party perceives that another has frustrated, or is about to frustrate, some concern of his” (Thomas, 1992, p. 265). From a commercial perspective, conflicts of interest have been narrowed further to include executives, office holders or organisations faced with situations where a decision which they have influenced has the potential to benefit their private interest (Demski, 2003). Demski (2003) identifies that those who are likely to be in a conflict of interest situation include auditors, boards of directors, analysts and investment bankers, regulators and management. He further adds that the occurrence of conflicts of interest among this wide group is inevitable. Handfield and Baumer (2006) outline that conflicts of interest may occur in situations where individuals are giving or receiving gifts, transactions with family, investments and use of company resources. The existence of conflicts of interest presupposes that those in a decision making capacity are motivated by personal wealth maximisation. The notion of conflict of interest is therefore an individualistic construct.

Conflicts of interest may be handled in a number of ways depending on the situation in which it arises. In the case of auditors, analysts and investment bankers, Demski (2003) outlines that conflicts of interest may be managed through the auditing (Generally Accepted Auditing Standards, or GAAS) regulations governing financial analyst and brokers, and accounting standards (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles, or GAAP). Similarly, in the field of accountancy, such conflicts are managed through the financial accounting framework. In the case of regulators, conflicts of interest may be managed through disseminating the standards development process to a number of stakeholders and thereby ensuring that the standards are a reflection of the collective views of society. Conflicts of interest involving directors on a board may be managed through a requirement to have a number of independent directors as part of their complement. At the operational level, conflicts of interest are commonly managed through disclosure of the conflict of interest and or by removing of the party in conflict from the decision making process.

The occurrence of conflicts of interest has been debated throughout the multiple level of Samoan society. Participant 3 and 7, from the auditing and accounting profession and participant 11, a business consultant, suggest that the occurrence of conflicts of interest in Samoan society is inevitable. In particular they argue that the inevitability of such conflicts is due to the small size of the community and extended network of relationships that characterise Samoan society.

The conflict of interest debate in Samoa is complicated by an underlying disparity in paradigms. On the one hand the notion of conflict of interest is an individualistic construct based on the assumption that individuals are driven by a desire to maximise their personal wealth. On the other hand the extant literature argues (discussed in earlier chapter) that Samoan society is based on a collective mentality (*fa'aSamoa*). This collective society assumes its members to act in the collective interest rather than their own. Participants 6 (a regulator) and 7 (an accountant) suggest that conflicts of interest, while inevitable, may be managed by separating culture from the practice of accounting. They suggest that accountants should diligently follow the code of ethics of their profession. Participant 7 says:

You're actually guided by certain policies and standards that are there for you to guide your work and it (culture) should not in any point of time affect your work as an accountant (49).

Within the government sector, internal controls and other regulations are being increasingly introduced to both manage conflicts of interest and increase accountability. Participant 11 acknowledges that the mere raising of conflicts of interest is often regarded as an attack on one's personal credibility. However he outlines that it should be "standard practice that before we start off a meeting, first thing is to register, are there any potential conflict of interest coming up" (111). He adds that this process is new to the Samoan culture but is nevertheless being increasingly employed.

A number of participants, (6 and 10) suggest conflicts of interest need to be managed in such a way as to acknowledge Samoa's collective social structure. Participant 6 points out that in dealing with conflicts of interest, individuals need to think of the entity that they are representing and the wider community including their family. She points out that; "you represent your family in anything that you do, you carry that name around" (38). Participant

10, an accountant, suggests that in line with many of the collective customs of Samoa, some actions that would otherwise be regarded in a western culture as unethical are acceptable. In particular, he points out that ministerial perks that are shared by members of that person's family may be regarded as a conflict of interest and unethical in a western context, but that in Samoa, these merely represent a case of sharing both the responsibility and the reward that is associated with such a position. In the same way that the extended family contributes towards resourcing traditional obligations (*fa'alavelave*) that are tied to a minister or titleholder, they should also share in the rewards that flow back to that minister because of their position or title.

Conflict of interest is an individualistic construct based on personal wealth maximisation. This is inconsistent with the collective nature of Samoan society (*fa'aSamoa*) where individuals are expected to act in the collective good. As individuals act in the collective interest of the wider community, the notion of conflict of interest, at least from a western perspective, appears redundant.

5.3 *The Samoan Language (Gagana Samoa) and Accountability*

Language has been identified by a number of participants as contributing both positively and negatively to accountability and the practice of accounting in Samoa. In particular the misalignment of traditional concepts with western accounting terminology coupled with a preference for oral forms of communication has introduced a number of challenges for accounting practitioners in Samoa.

The Samoan language (*Gagana Samoa*) is characterised as having a single dialect. Participant 5, an auditor, identifies this as facilitating the adopting of accounting in Samoa. He contrasts this with Vanuatu where there are many dialects and that this has been identified as a challenge for accountants practicing there. Despite the advantages of a single dialect for the adoption of accounting, it is overshadowed by the obstacles associated with differences in vocabulary and levels of oratory (formal, informal and oratory).

Brown, Tower and Taplin (2005) found that there was a preference among many South Pacific Island nations, including Samoa, to communicate orally. Although this was

historically associated with the inability to read and write, this preference has continued through to the present day. Participants 8 and 10, both members of the accounting profession, suggest that traditional accountability is associated with oral forms of communication. Participant 10, an auditor, further adds that effective oral communication in Samoa needs to appreciate the different contexts of language including the formal, informal and oratory. This introduces a number of challenges for the practice of accounting in Samoa. Firstly, a number of the younger practitioners do not appreciate the different levels of the Samoan language and were often misunderstood when delivering reports and asking questions during the audit process. Participant 9 notes:

I believe that the culture – accountability and what not comes with you asking the right question in the right language at the right time. I think people tend to withdraw from asking questions because they don't have the right language and also they're not very well prepared (70).

Secondly, participant 5, an auditor, outlined that oral traditions of communication lack the precision normally associated with western accountability. Participant 9, an accountant, comments that the exercise of being accountable is frustrated by the potential loss in meaning through misinterpretation. She notes one embarrassing situation where her description of an excessive volume of debtors was communicated instead in a derogatory sense as being a pile of waste. She explains that while this attracted laughter from the audience, it was nevertheless embarrassing.

Participant 2 (an auditor) outlines that the Samoan language is abstract (metaphoric) in nature. This is consistent with the view of the current Head of State (Tamasese, 2009) who suggests that the Samoan language is deliberately unspecific so as to allow for multiple interpretations and application to a number of different contexts. Participant 2 contrast the abstract language of traditional *fa'aSamoa* with the specific language used in western accounting reports.

The practice of accounting and accountability within Samoa has been shaped by the Samoan preference for oral communication and the need to preserve traditional concepts of *fa'aSamoa* together with specific language associated with western forms of accountability.

5.4 *Accountability within the Auditing process in Samoa*

The auditing profession is an integral part of the financial sector, both private and public, in Samoa. Despite this, the profession and the manner in which it is practiced are based on an individualistic construct which contrasts with the collective traditions of Samoa. The potential clash between these two paradigms, collective and individualistic, has impacted on the manner in which the auditing process is carried out.

The integrity of the auditing profession is based on the independence of the auditor, both in fact and in appearance (Demski, 2003). The independence of auditors provides for their ability to scrutinize, investigate and interpret the financial activity of the individual or organisation in question so as to provide an unbiased assurance that the accounts present a true and fair view.

A number of participants (5, 6, 7, 8 and 12) have identified that the independence of auditors has been compromised by the relationships that are entrenched within Samoan society. Participant 12 (senior accountant/auditor) describes the situation where young untitled auditors were reticent in their questioning those with a *matai* title. He writes “these youngsters (auditors) tend to shy away from asking difficult audit questions” (122) and reporting their audit findings. He summarises the situation as follows:

The most challenging for non-titled person (auditors) is not to report when they come across something that the titled person has done or failed to do. So breaching a procedure or something and then not reporting because they think...you know they can't report something bad about a person higher up-a titled person. That has been a challenge for us in terms of our people-our staff (131).

Many of these same participants suggest that whilst Samoa's collective culture acts to compromise the independence of auditors, the situation is manageable. Participant 1 (an auditor, also comments on this view and states that:

I suppose it's because of our culture of authority – the structure, hierarchy of the Matai system that no one should question the matai and no one should question the people in authority...I suppose in that respect, that's the cultural impact.

Furthermore, participant 12 also suggests that cultural influence is inevitable in Samoa but that through observance of the codes of practice and auditing standards, the integrity of the

audit process is preserved. Participant 6 and 12 identified that senior partners are able to bridge the gap between untitled young auditors and titled clients by accompanying them during their initial contact or meeting. During this initial meeting the senior partner will normally outline the rationale for the audit and thereby encouraged client cooperation. Participant 5 and 6 argue that the audit process, in order to be effective, needs to acknowledge the existence of traditional relationships and the values of *alofa* (love) and *fa'aaloalo* (respect), which are the basis of *fa'aSamoa*. She comments:

You can't remove your culture 100% from the workplace because *e iai lava le fa'aaloalo* (of the existence of relationships)...regardless of the positions and how they're ranked in an organisation – we should never forget *le fa'aaloalo i le aganu'u fa'aSamoa* (respect that exists in relationships in the Samoan culture) (41)

Recent audits carried out in the public sector have revealed a number of alleged irregularities which highlight the clash between the collective and individualistic paradigms and the potential to misinterpret the rationale behind various actions. Participant 10, an auditor, argues that auditors have disclosed acts which demonstrate a lack of accountability at both western and cultural level. He suggests that culture has been used as a convenient excuse for departing from being accountable. Participant 1 shares this view and adds:

...sometimes i believe that people use our culture when it suits them..I think most of the time, people use our culture when it affects them, and when they don't want to be accountable – they use our culture to try and justify lack of accountability, but I don't believe that's our culture.

This should not be mistaken as a criticism of Samoan culture but as an example of its misuse. Participant 6, a regulator, outlines that clashes in accountability between the west and *fa'aSamoa* is not because of the culture in itself but the way in which it is applied in the western context. Audit findings have not always been acted upon in order to protect the wider collective interest of the community. The sanctioning of one individual within a collective society will often have negative ramifications for the often vast entrenched network of which that individual is a part. This custom of *va-fealoa'i* (entrenched traditional relationships) is captured by the following quote by the current Head of State, Taisi Tamasese (Tamasese, 2009):

I am not an individual, because i share a tofi (an inheritance) with my family, my village, and my nation. I belong to my family and my family belongs to me. I

belong to my village and my village belongs to me. I belong to my nation and my nation belongs to me. This is the essence of my sense of belonging. These are the reference points that define who I am, and they are the reference points of other Samoans (p. 80).

The practice of auditing is complicated by Samoa's collective social hierarchy. Western notions of accountability appeared to be compromised by the need to accommodate the extensive network of relationships that characterise Samoan society. Whilst the potential clash in paradigms may be managed through greater communication and separating culture from business, the reality is a compromise between the two. This compromise aims to preserve the traditional values that have ensured the ongoing peace and stability of Samoa while embracing the inevitable spread of international commerce.

5.5 Accounting Standards and Accountability in Samoa

The accounting standards used in Samoa are based on the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) issued by International Accounting Standards Board (IASB). In the case of American Samoa, both IFRS and US GAAP (General Accepted Accounting Practice) are permitted (Haribhakti, 2008). The accounting profession in Samoa was formerly established in 1959 as the Western Samoa Society of Accountants (WSSA), and represents one of the oldest professional bodies in Samoa (Mckee & Garner, 1996, p. 71). This organisation was reconstituted in 2006 as Samoa Institute of Accountants (SIA) ("Samoa Institute of Accountants Act," 2006). Although the increasing adoption of IFRS is a relatively recent occurrence, western accounting principles have existed as long as the profession. As with many other Pacific Island nations, the introduction of western accounting systems to Samoa did not replace any pre-existing systems (Brown & Tower, 2002).

Brown and Tower (2002) suggest that the introduction of western accounting standards to underdeveloped countries, including the small island nations of the Pacific, is inappropriate. They suggest that western accounting standards fail to appreciate the traditional values, beliefs and means of communication predominant in these countries. Participant 5, 9 and 12 share this view for the case of Samoa. Participant 9, an accountant comments that a

traditional value of *alofa* (love), which is central to *fa'aSamoa*, is difficult to capture within an accounting reporting framework. She explains:

As I said about the Samoan culture how it's all about giving, I could also say in there, that it's all about love, and how you express your love. So how do you quantify love? You can't, so I guess that's why they say, well you can't account for it (69).

Participant 12 agrees with this view in relation to taxation. He argues that *fa'alavelave* (traditional form of gifting), an integral part of the *fa'aSamoa*, is not recognised in the western commercial context, as such gifting is not tax deductible. *Fa'alavelave* however is an unavoidable part of the Samoan protocol during formal, ceremonial and festive, occasions.

The small size of many of the Pacific Island nations, including Samoa, renders it impractical to develop a specific national accounting standard. Small nations are therefore compelled to adopt the western accounting systems that are used by their trading partners (Nobes, 1998). In the case of American Samoa, both IFRS and US GAAP are permitted as a reflection of the significant influence of the United States (Haribhakti, 2008). In the case of Samoa, the influence of both New Zealand and Australia is encouraged the adoption of IFRS (Haribhakti, 2008). This view has been shared by a number of participants in this study. Participant 7 (accountant) comments that:

The standards (those used in Samoa) have actually been drawn up alongside IFRS and IAS, and even so at this time we haven't been independent enough to have our own standards, so we're actually using the IFRS and IAS (44).

Any accounting system, in order to be effective, needs to reflect the environment and social setting, in which it is implemented (Brown & Tower, 2002; Nobes, 1998). For many Pacific Island nations, where they have been obliged to follow the accounting standards of the west, this has not always been achieved (Davie, 2000). The accounting standards (IFRS) have been developed to accommodate for the needs of large companies (multinational). For undeveloped nations with few large entities, including Samoa, these accounting standards are found inappropriate (Brown & Tower, 2002). The current research identifies two areas where this inappropriateness exists. Firstly, many businesses in Samoa are family based (Gibson, 2000). These small firms are structured in such a way that the ownership and management are shared by members of the family. This is consistent with

that found in Malaysia (Haniffa, 2006) and Philippines (Dyball & Valcarcel, 1999). Furthermore, many of these family businesses are not regarded as separate from the family and community. Participant 7 explains that in her work as an accountant, she recognises the need to deviate from the rigid nature of the accounting standards when it comes to preparing financial reports for family businesses (50). Secondly, the adoption of western accounting standards in the public sector has resulted in cases where traditional protocols have been misinterpreted. Participant 10 (auditor) discusses the situation where government ministers were accused of abusing their ministerial position by sharing their privileges with members of their family. From a traditional perspective, sharing the cost of customary responsibilities and the rewards that flow from it are regarded as normal.

Managing the clash between western accounting standards and *fa'aSamoa*, has in part been achieved through the enactment of legislations including Companies Act 2001 and Public Bodies (Performance and Accountability) Act 2001. These statutes have acted to define the boundaries between collective accountability, embedded in *fa'aSamoa*, and western forms of accountability prescribed by IFRS. Participant 6, a regulator, shares this view and comments:

when you do your reporting, there are a whole lot of regulations that you have to comply with, for e.g. here at Development Bank, there's the Development Bank Act, Public Monies Act, the IFRS, and then you have to account for everything that go into your financials (32).

In addition, these legislations have been established to further ensure independence within the public sector. In particular these statutes act to ensure the independence of the governing boards of state-owned enterprise, from the influence of traditional protocols of *fa'aSamoa* (based on traditional relationships; *va-fealoa'i*). The enactment of these acts represents a shift from collectivism towards western accountability. Participant 3, another regulator, comments:

There is now a new Act, named the Public Bodies, Performance and Accountability Act 2001, where corporations are all required to be accountable under this act. E.g. under this act, corporations are now required to produce quarterly financial reports etc and also the new Companies Act 2001. These are all in relation to enforcing accountability and transparency because the government has moved to phasing out the ministerial influence in Boards (17).

The traditional protocols of *fa'aSamoa*, based on *fa'aaloalo*, inevitably influence the manners in which accounting standards (IFRS) are practiced in Samoa. The notion of *fa'aaloalo*, involving gifting, entrenched in the collective nature of *fa'aSamoa* may be confused as acts of bribery in a western framework. Participant 12 argues that the practice of western accounting in Samoa acknowledges the existence of these traditional protocols and accommodates for them as far as possible without compromising the accounting standards.

The traditional nature of *fa'aSamoa*, which is characterise with oral forms of communication, as it was outlined in the literature review, contrasts with the written and meticulous recording keeping practices, associated with western accounting standards. This represents a challenge for practitioners attempting to introduce western reporting mechanisms, particularly on the western form of accountability, in relation to accounting, that it is through the reporting and disclosure of all recorded transactions that occurred over the reporting period. This notion of recording in accounting conflicts with oral forms of communication largely found in *fa'aSamoa*. Participant 8, an accountant, a practising accountant, describes this challenge in relation to accountability during *saofa'i* (ceremony for bestowment of *matai* titles). She notes:

Accountability in the Samoan culture – it's not documented. E.g. in Samoan families, in *fa'alavelave*, during *saofa'i* – e.g. if 10 people are doing their *saofa'i* and they each have to contribute WST\$5,000, the *matai* will collect with WST\$50,000 and then he'll distribute it – and he'll verbally inform the family on how that money was accounted for. You don't document it. No. *E fa'alau mai i luma o le aiga* how that money was spent. That's culturally how the Samoans do it. They just do it openly, and distribute it openly, while the whole family is there, and that's how you account for everything. That's accountability within the Samoan culture...Nothing is written down and documented (59).

Similarly, participants 4 (whom is an accountant and also a politician) and 9 (an accountant) describe the situation where some customary events focus on recording the gifts that are received from donors rather than how they are utilized or redistributed. Participant 4, a politician outlines that:

In the Samoan society, there is a hierarchical *matai* system – whereby *matais* are the head of families, *sa'o o aiga*. During *fa'alavelave* the families come together collectively to contribute towards the *fa'alavelave* and these contributions are aggregated to represent one family, one *matai*. In such context, *matais* are not accountable to the last cent (19).

This seemingly casual form of traditional reporting reflects the underlying values and relationships that exist within the Samoan culture. Gifts received from families and community members are recorded as a demonstration of acknowledgment. The distribution or utilisation of these gifts is measured only from the perspective of whether or not the event is successful. For example, a successful event is measured on whether the attendants at the function were suitably catered for, and entertained. Participant 10, an auditor, also shares this view, and adds that:

Many of the things we give up, we don't record, and when they come back, the returns, are so much more and still we don't record it. So our accountability is embodied in the response of people and that's the measure of what we're responsible for (95).

Sanctions have been argued to be a necessary part in the process of accountability. Davis (1973) writes "accountability should always go with responsibility, and it is poor social control to allow any other kind of arrangement" (p. 320). Patton (1992) argues that "there is no real accountability unless the receiver of the information can reward or punish the accountant for whatever the accountant is being held accountable" (p. 167). This view is shared by participant 11, an entrepreneur, who argues that the establishment of clear and severe sanctions were required in Samoa in order to ensure greater compliance with accounting standards and accountability. The sanctions which exist as part of western accounting standards can take on a number of forms. These include delisting of companies, loss of reputation and goodwill, removal of members from the accounting institute through to monetary penalties following legal proceedings. The most common sanction for members of the accounting profession is having their membership revoked. Loss of membership not only entails loss of membership privileges but also significant compromise to the reputation of the member in question. Participants 6 (regulator), 7 (accountant) and 13 (politician), emphasized the importance of accounting practitioners following the code of practice specific to their profession. In particular, participant 13 says:

In all these accounting ethics, the accounting ethics dictates absolute honesty and accuracy. Dishonesty in the accounting profession results in heavier penalties, such as dismissal or the case of members being disbarred i.e. the removal of their names from the SIA (Samoa Institute of Accountants) registry (143a).

Traditional accountability in Samoa is based on the principles, values and beliefs that underpin the Samoan way of life or *fa'aSamoa*. As discussed in section 4.2, these principles values and beliefs include the importance of relationships (*va fealoa'i*), respect (*fa'aaloalo*) and love (*alofa*). The sanctions in such a traditional society take the form of loss of status, honour, integrity and position in the social hierarchy. Comparing these traditional sanctions to those in the accountancy profession, there would appear to be little difference. The loss of face associated with an accounting practitioner being removed from the profession, is similar to the dishonour that a titleholder (*matiai*) would face, should they act in their own interest rather than that of the collective community. While there is a clear lack of written sanctions within *fa'aSamoa*, the unwritten, yet entrenched value base, provides a self-regulatory mechanism that preserves the ongoing social harmony.

The accounting standards used in Samoa are based on those of the west. Implementing such standards within Samoa's collective society highlights a number of challenges that impact on the practice of accounting and accountability. These include the inability of the western accounting framework to capture and accurately report many traditional activities that are an inseparable part of Samoan commerce. Activities of family businesses, the customary responsibilities of government ministers, are often misinterpreted as fraudulent or unethical. Furthermore, western sanctions aimed at promoting financial accountability appear misplaced in a society where an entrenched value base (*fa'aSamoa*) acts to self-regulate the behaviours of its members and reduce the incidence of malfeasance.

5.6 *Religion and Accountability in Samoa*

The introduction of Religion to Samoa has affected its society and accountability in a number of ways. These include adding church leaders as an additional layer of authority to the existing social hierarchy, introducing an additional level of accountability (covenant), and reinforcing the collective accountability that pre-date the arrival of European colonisers.

Section 4.2.3, of this study, outlines the assimilation of the religions of the west, with the traditional culture of Samoa. The outcome of this assimilation has been a superimposing of

another layer of authority to Samoa's already complex system of *fa'amatai*. Together with this additional layer of authority was a shift in the accountability that members of the community had to one another and to the church. Members of a village are accountable to their family titleholders (*matais*) together with that of the church. While the two do not appear to have clashed over the decades that they have co-existed, the degree of accountability that otherwise would have existed without religion, would have undoubtedly been stronger from a *fa'aSamoa* and *fa'amatai* perspective. The introduction of Christianity amounted to a sharing of power between leaders of the church and titleholders. The fusion of the two has also resulted in many religious events being carried out in a manner consistent with that of *fa'aSamoa*.

The second major influence of religion on Samoan society has been the inclusion of a new level of accountability. This new level of accountability, referred to as covenant accountability, defines the relationship and duty, members of a church have to God. Berry (2005) defines this form of accountability (covenant) as follows:

The primary accountability of a Christian is to God and is a matter of theological beliefs and conscience which is best seen as a covenant, a kind of bond of mutuality, between a faithful God and his faithful (obedient) followers (p. 263).

The extant literature supports the view that the fusion of Christianity and Samoan culture has been harmonious (Anae, 1998; Cote, 1997; Kramer, 1995; Lawson, 1996) (also refer to section 4.2.3). The enthusiastic embracing of Christianity, and in particular covenant accountability, in Samoa, is partly attributable to the close alignment of the underlying values between the two. An extension of Berry's covenant accountability is that of loving your neighbour as yourself. This link is outlined in the Gospel of Mathew:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and fore-most commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself (Mathew 22: 37 – 39, NASB).

Christianity, through the principles of sharing, love and respect has reinforced the traditional values of *fa'aSamoa* and the notion of collective accountability.

Covenant accountability is inseparably tied to the rewards and sanctions afforded to those identified as obedient followers. The promise of everlasting life and fear of divine

punishment acts to regulate the behaviours of the members of the church. In Samoa, where majority of the population are church followers (refer to section 4.2.3), this sense of self-regulation renders the need for western accountability and the codes of ethics which characterise the profession, redundant. Participant 9 shares this view and argues that this form of covenant accountability is the basis for the notion that Samoa is founded on God (*E fa'avae i le Atua, Samoa*).

5.7 *Some compromises in Western Accountability*

Fa'aSamoa has not always taken second place to that of western accountability. A number of participants (9, 11 & 12) indicate compromises in western accountability to accommodate the Samoan culture. A number of writers have suggested that the success of western corporations operating in developing countries, is linked to their ability to acknowledge and accommodate the physical and cultural environment in which they operates (Brown & Tower, 2002; Nobes, 1998). To this end, participants 9, 10 and 11 suggest that *fa'aSamoa* has assisted in this process. Participant 11 concurs with the view that corporations have a social responsibility and that *fa'aSamoa* helps them to recognise this. Participant 12 suggests that the practice of accounting may be carried out in such a manner that it incorporates the Samoan culture. Participant 9 adds that some corporations have even gone so far as to accommodate the collective responsibilities of its workers by providing a system of advancing their pay.

5.8 *Similarities between Fa'aSamoa and Western Accountability*

Despite the contrast between collective accountability associated with *fa'aSamoa*, and the individualistic accountability of the west, there is evidence to support the notion that both are able to coexist harmoniously. Participant 13 argues that there is a harmony between western and collective accountability that is manifest in the similarities between the two. He identifies that the verbal reports provided at the village *fono* (council of *matais*) are little different from those within the accounting profession. He comments:

the reporting requirements (a crop planting project) although done verbally, is equivalent to the reporting requirements that are so necessary in the accounting

profession. Actual visitations by the committee of the village to pursue the execution of village policies is equivalent to the work done by auditors to physically site the existence of assets, properties that are supposedly owned by the client and appearing in the books (141).

The co-existence between western accountability and that associated with *fa'aSamoa* is inevitable. The tensions that exist between the two are likely to continue leading to compromises on both sides. However, a focus on similarities and building on the strengths from each is likely to result in a harmony that will benefit Samoa as a country that is developing in a global environment.

CHAPTER 6: Summary and Conclusion

6.1 *Introduction*

The following chapter provides a summary of the research findings and discussion as to how these findings answers the research question outlined in chapter 1 and 2. The broad research question for this study is what are the impacts of Samoan culture on accountability in the accounting profession in Samoa? The findings summarized below should be considered in the context of the literature on accountability and background to Samoa outlined chapters 3 and 4 respectively.

6.2 *The inevitability of Western Accountability*

Section 5.2.1 provides discussion of the factors encouraging the introduction of western accountability and accounting to Samoa. This study identifies six factors in total. The first is that of globalisation and the spread of multinational enterprises across the South Pacific. Secondly, political development in the South Pacific Rim and in particular the influence of Australia and New Zealand has significantly encouraged the spread of western accountability in Samoa. The third driver is that of foreign aid. Donor countries are demanding greater level of reporting with respect to the foreign aid that they provide Samoa. The framework for this reporting is based on western accountability principles and the standards of the accounting profession. International trade and the increasing use of currency, representing the fourth and fifth factors, have encouraged the shift in mindset towards western accountability. As discussed in 5.2.1.5, money is now commonly used to fulfil customary commitments, often replacing traditional crafts. The last of the factors driving the adoption of western accountability is that of education. Education has not only supported Samoa's economic and social development, but has also become the vehicle that has systematically replaced traditional Samoan culture with that of the west. These six factors paint a clear picture of the introduction of western accountability to Samoa is

inevitable. The harmony or lack thereof between western accountability and Samoa's collectivist society is further summarized below.

6.3 *Cultural obstacles to Western Accountability*

In section 5.2.2, three characteristics of Samoan society are discussed together with their impact on the accountability in the accounting profession. Relationships based on respect (*fa'aaloalo*) and love (*alofa*) has had the impact of reducing individual accountability. Furthermore, the notion that Samoan people are accountable to the wider community acts to self-regulate their behaviour and the incidents of fraud. The argument that Samoan culture (*fa'a Samoa*) is used as a convenient cover up for fraud is therefore unfounded. Their focus on their collective responsibilities to the wider community has compromised their commitment to their personal obligations. Traditional sharing and reciprocity is an example of collective accountability. This form of collective accountability is self-regulating and acts to prevent resource underutilization (hoarding), and encourage social harmony. This however acts to makes redundant the individualistic type of accountability associated with the accounting profession (refer 5.2.2.2). The third of the major Samoan characteristic identified in this study, is that of *fa'alavelave* (traditional events). Behind the *fa'alavelave* tradition is the focus shared by many Samoan people on the occasion or the event rather than the cost associated with it. The focus that Samoan people have with the event detracts from the detailed analysis and reporting of the cost of these events prescribed by the accounting profession (refer section 5.2.2.3).

6.4 *The Redundancy of Conflict of Interest*

Conflict of interest is a product of western accountability refers to the situation where decision makers may potentially benefit from the decisions they're making rather than those who are identified as beneficiaries. The current study has revealed that the conflict of interest debate is found at all levels of Samoa's social hierarchy. Furthermore, participants in this study suggest managing conflicts of interests necessarily requires the

acknowledgment of *fa'aSamoa* (refer section 5.3). However, conflict of interest is an individualistic construct based on personal wealth maximisation. This is inconsistent with the collective nature of Samoan society (*fa'aSamoa*) where individuals are expected to act in the collective good. As individuals act in the collective interest of the wider community, the notion of conflict of interest, at least from a western perspective, appears redundant.

6.5 *The Impact of Language and Oral Traditions*

The Samoan language (*Gagana Samoa*) contributes both positively and negatively to the adoption of western accountability within the accounting profession in Samoa. The single dialect has been identified as being positively contributing to the adoption of western accountability. This is however a relative point as this advantage is only appreciated when compared to countries such as Vanuatu where there are multiple dialects. A significant disadvantage of the Samoan language and western accountability is the incompatibility in both English and Samoan words to capture complex and technical concepts unique to either accounting or Samoa. An extension of this is the abstract (metaphoric) nature of the Samoan language and its contrast with the more precise construction of the English language. The third aspect of language that acts to frustrate the adoption of western accountability is the preference for oral forms of communication. This is in contrast to accounting reports and statements which are normally presented in written form. Apart from the benefits of having a single dialect, Samoan language and the preference for oral forms of communication do not facilitate the adoption of western forms of accountability within the accounting profession.

6.6 *Fa'aSamoa and the Auditing Profession*

Auditing is an integral part of the accounting profession and exists to encourage the preservation of western forms of accountability. This study has revealed a number of views that support the notion of compromise of auditor independence and the use of culture as an excuse for fraudulent behaviour (refer section 5.5). However a shared view among many

senior auditors included in this study is that of incorporation of *fa'aSamoa* into the execution of the audit function. In particular, auditors will go further to fulfilling their audit duties by acknowledging the importance of relationships (*va fealoa'i*) and building this into their audit strategy. The findings of this study also acknowledge the role of honorific and working through the *fa'amatai* hierarchy as a means of opening up dialogue between auditor and client.

6.7 *The Incompatibility of Accounting Standards and Fa'aSamoa*

The accounting standards and the manner in which they are applied are influenced by Samoan culture despite the overwhelming pressure for Samoa to adopt international western accounting standards (IFRS). The impact that Samoan culture has on accountability in the accounting profession is an outcome of the clash between *fa'aSamoa* and the accounting regulatory framework. The inability for the current set of standards to capture customary activities results in a deviation from the rigid prescription of IFRS and in some cases has resulted in the misinterpretation of customary acts as fraud (refer section 5.6). Similarly *fa'aSamoa* is often not able to capture the technical concepts inherent within the accounting profession. Section 5.6 illustrates this inconsistency in relation to *fa'alavelave* (traditional events). In particular during a *fa'alavelave*, accurate records are kept to list the contributions that people make to an event but the same level of diligent recording is not observed when these resources are distributed or used.

The introduction of the Companies Act 2001, Public Bodies Act 2001, and Samoa Institute of Accountants Act 2006 are examples of a legislative shift towards western accountability. These pieces of legislations have clarified the relationship between western accountability and *fa'aSamoa* and introduced clear sanctions in the event of breach. However, the implementation of these statutes and accounting standard has been done in a manner that acknowledges *fa'aSamoa*. This study identifies that part of this acknowledgment is that collective accountability is self-regulating and embodies its own sanctions in the form of loss reputation, alienation and potential removal of *matai* titles. These sanctions from a collective perspective render those associated with western accountability redundant.

6.8 *The impact of Religion*

Religion is an integral part of Samoan society and has impacted accountability in the accounting profession in two ways. Firstly the introduction of Religion has added a new layer of authority to Samoa's social hierarchy and encouraged the continuity of collective accountability. Secondly, religion has introduced to Samoa a new level of accountability in the form of covenant accountability (refer section 5.7). Samoan people are not only accountable to their *matai* leaders and to the wider community, but also to the church and to God. Covenant accountability has had the same impact as collective accountability in so far as rendering individual accountability redundant. The incidents of fraud are often seen as a matter to be dealt with by God rather than through legal sanctions.

6.9 *Pathways towards a Harmonious Coexistence*

Sections 5.8 and 5.9 do not specifically contribute towards the question of determining the impact of *fa'aSamoa* on accountability in the accounting profession in Samoa. However they offer insights as to how western accountability and the accounting profession can successfully coexist with *fa'aSamoa*. Section 5.8 suggests that western accountability needs to be internalised and made part of the social fabric in order for it to be accepted by those who it affects. Section 5.9 focuses on the similarities between western accountability and *fa'aSamoa*. Focusing on the similarities between the two and building on the strengths of each is likely to result in a harmony that will benefit Samoa as a country developing within a global environment.

6.10 *Limitations and a guide to Future Research*

The current study wishes to acknowledge a number of limitations that the current researcher was unable to fulfil, in which a future research could embark on. These limitations firstly include the selection of participants as it was largely based on their ranks as accountants in Samoa and their availability as well. This study could have drawn from other participants that are more involved in standard setting process in Samoa and more importantly draw on the experiences of business owners in Samoa and the implications they face in conducting businesses, a western concept, in a context largely based on *fa'aSamoa*. This study is also limited in so far as providing a historical study of accounting development in Samoa. This is also another area for future research, to document the development of accounting from the beginning of time. Accounting, as argued here in this study, was initially introduced to Samoa, as with other developing countries and Pacific island nations, through periods of colonialism by the Western countries. Many studies explored how accounting was used during these periods of colonialism as an instrument to transfer (by force) western policies onto the colonies. These studies, as discussed in the literature review, have been conducted in countries including Australia, Philippines, Malaysia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Fiji. However, the current study did not explore this view and this is potentially an area for another thesis or another project in the near future.

It is however, important to note here, that while these findings are not statistically generalisable, they are nevertheless a contribution to the academic literature by offering insights that may help in the development of theory and guide future research, both qualitative and quantitative in this area.

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