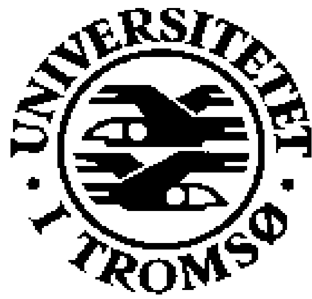

"Forget who we are and let the people free"

Changing Christianities and tradition in post tsunami Samoa

SOA-3900

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Master's thesis

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Spring 2011

Abstract

In September 2009, the south coast of Samoa was hit by a tsunami causing severe material damage and 143 casualties. Based on empirical data from two tsunami affected villages, this thesis explores how members of the affected communities made sense the tsunami and engaged in post disaster processes of social change. As will be illustrated, religious interpretations of the tsunami were articulated and emphasised by the affected population and the disaster incorporated into existing categories and Christian cosmologies of divine agency, the Second Coming of Christ, morality and tradition.

Making sense of novel events from already existing categories and cosmologies did not, however, result in reproduction and continuity. Rather, the tsunami seemed to have brought about significant religious change in the villages with new churches establishing and individuals and families changing affiliation from mainline to new churches. I will analyse how local actors make sense of the tsunami according to their religious affiliations and make use of these interpretations in bringing about or opposing religious change in the disaster aftermath. Understanding local interpretations is thus of vital importance in understanding post disaster response and behaviour.

Exploring the implications of religious change on social, economic and traditional life of the population in the two tsunami affected villages, this thesis will be illustrate how processes of religious change is by no means limited to clearly defined "religious spheres". Members of new churches were explicitly critical of practices and values considered key and defining elements of culture, tradition and social organisation, and I will argue that changing religious affiliation functioned as a language for expressing dissatisfactions and facilitating change with biblical interpretations and pastoral authority as legitimising foundation.

The overall approach of this thesis is to analyse not only what a disaster do to people, but also what people do with disasters in a processual and creative perspective. As will be argued, post disaster response and social change should be analysed in relation to ongoing processes of change, conditions and priorities on the local, national and global level, thus analysing disaster in the context of everyday life.

Acknowledgements

I especially wish to thank all my informants of Levao and Salesi for their hospitality and kindness and for opening up new worlds of understanding and experience to me. My greatest expressions of gratitude to my host family for being my home away from home and accepting me as a member of the family. Fa'afatai tele lava!

I am also grateful to the Early Recovery Team of the United Nations Development Programme in Apia, The Samoan Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, Nanai Sovala Agaiava and Professor Unasa Felice Va'a of the National University of Samoa.

Thank you fellow master students and staff of the University of Tromsø for useful comments and feedback while writing the thesis. A special expression of gratitude to my supervisor Sidsel Saugestad for both patience and insightful commentaries throughout the process. I am also grateful to the Department of Archaeology and Social Anthropology for economic support to carry out the fieldwork.

Finally, thanks are due to Maya Bjerrum Trinkjær for helpful linguistic comments and corrections and to my family and Mats Johannessen for untiring support, encouragement and understanding.

Storslett, May 2011

Sanne Bech Holmgaard

Glossary of Samoan terms[1]

Aga	social conduct, appropriate behaviour
Aitu	ghost or spirit
Alofa	love, compassion
Amio	individual will and desire
Ava	also referred to as kava, a ceremonial and mildly narcotic drink made from dried and grinded ava roots and used in ceremonial occations
Fa'aaloalo	respect, being polite
Fa'alavelave	family obligations and ceremonial occasions of exchange at life crisis events such as weddings, funerals and saofa'i. Literally meaning burden or "to make entangled"
Fa'amatai	the chiefly system of matais
Fa’apalagi	palagi way or palagi culture
Fa'asamoa	Samoan way, also referred to as Samoan culture
Fale	open style Samoan house
Feagaiga	brother/sister relationship - also used to describe the relationship between a village and its pastor.
Folafola	the reading out of names and amounts donated by specific individuals and families during church service
Fono	village council of chiefs
'Ie toga	decorative weaved fine mats
Ifoga	ceremonial apology and public humiliation in cases of serious offences. Members of the offender's family make amends by sitting outside the house of the family of the offended with fine mats over their heads
Lotu	church, evening prayer
Mai aitu	illness caused by spirits
Matai	chief, head of the family
Malosi	strength

[1] The definitions of terms are stated as they have been presented and defined by my informants and cross referenced with Shore 1982, So'o 2007, Thornton et al 2010 and Government of Samoa 2006.

Nu'u	village
Palagi	white person. Litteraly meaning the people from beyond the sky
Saofa'i	ceremony for bestowal of matai title
Tala	Samoan currency
Taulele'a	untitled man
Tautalaitiiti	being naughty, presuming about one's age
Tautua	service, to serve matais and village
Toana'i	elaborate traditional Sunday lunch

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Post tsunami destruction, south east Upolu (Source: UNDP).

Map of Samoa (Source: http://go.hrw.com/atlas/norm_map/samoa.gif)

1 Introduction

"*We really should have died in the tsunami*", Filia told me one day pointing at the battered frame of her old house:

> "*We should have died because our house is so close to the sea and we have nowhere to run behind the house. And it's so amazing, you know, our house is the only one still standing. And see this part of the village over there, they have so many places to run and there's so many people dead. And you know what, God protects us because he knows his own people. So his hand was on the tsunami, slowing it down on our house. Because he knows us!*".

Filia was a passionate member of a Pentecostal church which had been established in her village after the tsunami. In Samoa, rules regarding establishment of churches in a village is governed by a council of chiefs (*matais*), and the rules in Filia's village had long been that no new churches were allowed. However, after the tsunami these rules had changed, and less than one year after the tsunami, four new Christian churches had been established in the village in addition to the two so-called mainline churches already present.

I had come to Samoa to study local perceptions of a disaster and post disaster recovery. During my fieldwork in two tsunami affected villages, religious interpretations of the tsunami and the importance of post tsunami changing of church rules were continuously accentuated by my informants. This thesis explores local interpretations of the tsunami and analyses how people actively act upon their understandings of disaster in post tsunami processes of social and religious change. It is thereby a study of a disaster and a contribution to the field of anthropological disaster studies, exploring the importance of local perceptions of disaster in order to understand processes of change and continuity in disaster aftermath and recovery. It is also a study of religious change in the face of increasing expansion and popularity of Protestant evangelical churches, a development by no means unique to Samoa. The analysis of this thesis will explore how processes of religious change already taking place in Samoa have interacted with the disaster situation and how local actors make sense of the tsunami according to their religious affiliations and make use of these interpretations in bringing about or opposing religious change in the disaster aftermath.

1.1 The Samoan tsunami

On the 29th of September 2009, a magnitude 8,3 earthquake occurred in the southern Pacific Ocean approximately 200 kilometres south of Samoa, triggering a tsunami which hit the islands of Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga few minutes later. The highest number of fatalities and the largest extend of material damage occurred on the island of Upolu, one of two main islands of Samoa, with 143 casualties and an estimated population of approximately 5.300 individuals or 700 households affected. 19 villages in the southern and eastern coastal areas of Upolu were hit by two wave sources with wave run-ins reaching up to 400 meters inland. In the months following the tsunami, national authorities, overseas bilateral donor agencies and international relief organisations planned and executed a number of initiatives to assist the most severely affected households with emergency relief as well as longer term rebuilding of private homes, infrastructure and public services. The total value of the damages caused by the tsunami in Samoa has been estimated at 104.44 million US dollars, equivalent of approximately 20 percent of Samoa's gross domestic product. Material and economic damage mainly involved infrastructure, housing, water supply, agriculture and the tourism industry (Government of Samoa 2009a:10-16, Government of Samoa 2009b:7-10).

On the level of individual households, many had lost both houses and all material belongings. Only very few, and none that I knew off, had private insurance. The government with support from mainly New Zealand and Australia has given grants of 18.000 tala[2] (7900 USD) to families who had their homes destroyed and 10.000 tala (4400 USD) in compensation for severely damaged houses (IFRC 2010:2).

1.2 Background and choice of research topic and location

My intention has been to study local perceptions of a natural disaster and processes of disaster recovery. When planning and deciding upon fieldwork topic and location, I was working as a humanitarian intern at the Danish Foreign Mission[3] to the United Nations (UN) in Geneva, observing and participating in meetings and other activities in various humanitarian agencies, multi- and bilateral donor community groups and UN organisations. Natural disasters, the humanitarian consequences thereof and how best to approach relief and reconstruction needs were during my internship among the most prominent topics in the humanitarian

[2] Western Samoan Tala, national currency of Samoa. Exchange to United States Dollar is approximately 0.44 (100 tala = 44 US dollar).

[3] Permanent Diplomatic Mission of Denmark, a part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

organisations represented in Geneva both in direct response to current disasters and when humanitarian principles, terminology, policy, strategy and the constant issue of financing were discussed on a diplomatic level. As noted by anthropologist Mette Fog Olwig (2009), vulnerability reduction and resilience in relation to climate change and natural disasters have increasingly become major focus areas in international humanitarian organisations, which was also my impression from Geneva. During the course of my internship, I became increasingly curious about how disasters were experienced by affected populations and I wanted to explore local perceptions of disaster and vulnerability in the context of implementation of recovery and vulnerability reduction projects in a "real" disaster situation.

Pacific islands are often singled out as among the most vulnerable geographical areas and populations to both natural disasters and climate change (Mimura et al. 2007:689, Rubow 2009:88-93), which made the Pacific in general seem an interesting location for studying local perceptions of disasters and vulnerability. Following the Samoan tsunami, which happened during my time in Geneva, a number of relief and recovery projects were initiated which I felt gave me an opportunity to study local perceptions of both disaster and recovery processes in action. In addition to this, Samoa seemed a favourable setting in terms of safety and accessibility. I applied and obtained an internship position at the local United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office's Tsunami Early Recovery Team (ER team), which I felt would be a good starting point for studying disaster recovery.

Anthropologist Finn Sivert Nielsen argues that fieldwork locations cannot simply be chosen, but are constructed by preconceptions of the individual fieldworker as well as constructions of regional ethnographic stereotypes (Nielsen 1996:71-76). Samoa as ethnographic "field" has arguably played a key role in defining anthropology and the construction of "the Other" of ethnographic inquiry in the study by Margaret Mead in American Samoa and the critique by Derek Freeman almost half a century later (Freeman 1983, Mead 2001). I therefore admit to a certain excitement and almost a feeling of "going back" to an "authentic" and defining location in the making of anthropology. While realizing this I do, however, feel that my preconceptions quickly took a back-seat in the overwhelming experience of arriving in the field and my involvement with the UNDP and government partners, which bore little resemblance to ethnographic stereotypes of authenticity and otherness.

I did not initially intend for religious beliefs and change to be a main focus of my study. Having read about the dominant positions of Christian Churches in Samoa, I did have some vague preconceived ideas that religious faith might play a role in disaster perception and response, but I did not expect the importance of Christianity which I encountered. I thus became, as anthropologist Fenella Cannell (Cannell 2006:13) argue is the case for many scholars of Christianity, interested in the topic more by accident than by choice as I found it imperative to reflect in my research focus the strong preoccupation with Christianity expressed by my informants.

Since my intention was to study local perceptions, some weeks into my fieldwork I chose to redirect my focus from disaster recovery from the perspective of implementation of recovery projects to focus explicitly on how members of the affected population made sense of tsunami and post tsunami processes of change. As will be accounted for below, this also meant a shift from living in the capital city of Apia to living in the rural tsunami affected area.

1.3 Fieldwork localities and tsunami impact.

I did fieldwork in Samoa from April 14th to September 2nd 2010. The first 6 weeks were spent based in the capital city of Apia, the only urban area in Samoa with approximately 37.000 inhabitants. During these first weeks, I participated in the daily work of the UNDP ER team, which consisted of administrative chores, liaisons with government partners and participating in field trips to the tsunami affected areas. The weekends were spent visiting tsunami affected villages on my own.

While giving me valuable background data on both the tsunami, recovery activities and local governance principles and practices, I felt that I needed a more in-depth experience of life in the affected areas in order to get an insight into local perceptions of the tsunami and the post tsunami situation. I therefore decided to move to a tsunami affected village, terminating my internship with the support of the ER team leader. The rest of my time in Samoa was spent living with a family in the village of Levao[4] in the most severely affected area on the south coast of Upolu, and it is from this part of my fieldwork that the majority of primary empirical data is generated, which will be accounted for more thoroughly in chapter 2. In the following, the two villages of my study and how they have been affected by the tsunami will be presented.

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[4] Names of places and people have been changed for protection of anonymity of my informants.

1.3.1 Levao

Levao is a village of less than 400 inhabitants, but despite the relatively small size it is generally considered a powerful village, being the home of a high chiefly title and a prominent government minister. The district secondary school is located in the village and a large and costly district library is currently under construction. The village pastor and his wife also both hold prominent positions in the national administration of the Congregational Christian Church[5] of Samoa, which is the only church in the village.

Before the tsunami, Levao consisted of a coastal stretch of houses by the "*Beach Road*" which encircles the island of Upolu. The church and pastor's house, primary and secondary school, a shop and a few residential houses were located along a gravel road leading up to the plantation areas behind the village. All houses were lying close together in a triangular shape with the pointed end away from the sea. After the tsunami, the physical structure of Levao changed. All houses by the Beach Road were severely damaged and most were destroyed. Some, including the house in which I lived, had been rebuild, but many families had moved further up the hills which had created two new residential areas: one behind the secondary school building, which was previously the last building before the plantations, and one spread out along another gravel road at the eastern end of the village leading up to the plantation areas of the neighbouring village of Salesi.

Materially, Levao was severely damaged by the tsunami with the majority of inhabitants affected and most houses either demolished or severely damaged. With regards to casualties, however, Levao was more fortunate than its neighbouring villages as only two people died and many villagers considered themselves lucky compared to their friends and neighbours in Salesi.

1.3.2 Salesi

Prior to the tsunami, all houses in Salesi were located along the Beach Road for a distance of a couple of kilometres starting only a few hundred meters from the eastern Levao village border. The village consisted of a long, flat stretch of land between the coast line and the steep tree-covered hills leading up to the plantational lands on a mountain plateau. The posterior hills being much too steep and porous for any roads to be built, the gravel road leading to the

[5] "Church" with a capital C refers to the organisational body of the denomination as a whole, while "church" with a lower case c refers to the individual village level denominations or church buildings

plantations was located on the eastern side of Levao, where the hills were softer and more gradually sloping.

Unlike Levao, Salesi has a long stretch of white sandy beaches, making it a popular tourist destination for Samoans and foreigners alike. Before the tsunami, ten locally operated small scale tourist accommodations with cheap and simple open houses on the beach (beach *fale)*, were located in Salesi and created some cash income and employment. All of these were completely destroyed in the tsunami and only one had been reopened.

Like Levao, the material damages in Salesi were severe, as all houses were located close to the sea. With a death count of 36 out of approximately 500 inhabitants, Salesi was also among the villages in Samoa with the highest fatality rates. Geographical differences between Levao and Salesi were probably an important factor in the different fatality rates, as the residents of Levao could relatively easily escape from the wave on the gradually sloping plantation road, whereas the inhabitants of Salesi were trapped between the sea and the steep hills.

Salesi's physical structure had changed even more dramatically Levao's after the tsunami, as the majority of households had relocated to the plantations on the mountain plateau, thus creating a new village in the plantations. The plantation road starting in Levao had been expanded and was the only road leading up to the new village. As the crow flies, "*old Salesi*" is not far from "*new Salesi*"; however, walking from the centre of old village to the centre of the new along the plantation road takes close to two hours, and being both hot and steep, mainly the young men working on their family's plantations (and a determined anthropology student) could occasionally be seen venturing out on this journey. Insufficient water supply in new Salesi, lack of resources to build new houses and other both practical and personal motives had caused approximately ten households to stay behind in old Salesi. The remaining houses were in a state of decay, giving the village the look of an almost abandoned ghost town.

1.4 Research objective and focus of the thesis.

In this thesis I propose some answers to a research question that I formulate in its most general form: *How is the tsunami perceived by members of the affected population and in what ways do differently positioned individuals in the area engage in and make sense of post tsunami processes of change and continuity?*

During my fieldwork, I found that the topic of Christian churches and beliefs were of central concern to my informants, manifested in both religious interpretations of the tsunami and concerning change and continuity in the tsunami aftermath. I also found that members of both mainline and new churches acted upon these religious understandings in bringing about, accepting or opposing post tsunami religious change. By religious change I refer to the change of rules allowing new churches to be established in the village of Salesi as well as the changes in beliefs, re-affiliation to a new Christian denomination entails. In the interpretations of the tsunami and post tsunami change, members of new and mainline churches also expressed markedly different attitudes towards shared concepts of tradition and *fa'asamoa* ("the Samoan way"). I found that members of new churches in some contexts actively defined themselves in opposition to tradition and to concepts of cultural continuity, as is indicated in the quotation forming the title of this thesis with a member of a newly established church stating that he wanted to "*forget who we are and let the people free*".

Thus having tentatively identified some key empirical findings based on my general research question, I sharpen the analytical focus of the discussions and ask: *How do differently positioned individuals engage in and make sense of post tsunami processes of religious change? In what ways are local tsunami responses based on different religious interpretations of the disaster? How do post tsunami processes of religious change and increasing plurality of denominations influence attitudes towards tradition and fa'asamoa?*

In the following two sections, I account for some selected theoretical perspectives on two concepts central to the analysis of this thesis: disaster and tradition.

1.5 Anthropological perspectives on disasters

According to anthropologists Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman, who have been among the most influential anthropologists in the field of disaster research, early anthropological studies of natural disasters in the middle and first half of the previous century appear to have come into existence as anthropologists found themselves on the scene of disasters more by coincidence than by explicit interest in studying disasters in their own right. The functionalist emphasis of anthropology of the 1950s and 60s on "the construction of cultural profiles based on the ethnography of 'normal daily' life precluded addressing the issues of disruption and change that disasters represented" (Hoffman & Oliver-Smith 2002:5) and social scientist generally approached disasters as extreme and unpredictable events which

fell upon communities causing disruption from the existing order and social equilibrium (ibid:3-6, Oliver-Smith 1999a:23-24).

1.5.1 Vulnerability and process

In the 1970s and 80s, a new theoretical approach to the anthropology of disaster began to take form with studies demonstrating the significance of social and cultural conditions on the impact and damage of disasters (Hoffman & Oliver-Smith 1999:7-9, Hewitt 1998:77). According to Oliver-Smith, anthropologists in the field of political economy focusing on power, history and structures of inequality were increasingly making disaster an explicit topic of interest causing:

> "a rethinking of disasters from a political-economic perspective, based on the correlation between disaster proneness, chronic malnutrition, low income, and famine potential, which lead to the conclusion that root causes of disasters lay more in the social than in nature" (Oliver-Smith 2002:27).

The political ecology of today extends to the global level, analysing the risks of global warming and increasing patterns of disasters worldwide as a global mal-adaptation to environmental conditions which is increasing vulnerability along the lines of global structures of inequality (ibid:43-45).

One of the first to conceptualize these thinkings was cultural geographer Kenneth Hewitt, whose critique of the then dominant functionalist view of disasters has greatly influenced the approach to disasters in anthropology (Hewitt 1983, Oliver-Smith 2002:27). Hewitt argues that disaster studies were generally approaching disasters as phenomenon attributed to hazardous agents from the natural or technological realm and cut off from everyday human experience and activity (Hewitt 1998:78). Arguing that disasters are not located in a natural hazard per se, but resulting from vulnerabilities and inequalities produced in the social realm, Hewitt criticised what he termed "the hazard paradigm", which locates the cause of a disaster in a physical agent and thus placed outside society:

> "The most contentious result of the hazards paradigm generally (...) is the tacit assumption of an unexamined normality; supposedly predictable, managed, stable and the basis of productive society. That goes along with the sense that disasters involve events having little or nothing to do with the rest of life and environment" (ibid:80).

Hewitt thus conceptualizes disasters as arising in the conjuncture of individual, community or societal vulnerabilities of a human population and a potentially destructive agent, thereby

placing disasters in the nexus of environment, society and technology, arising from interplay of these elements (Oliver-Smith 2002:24, Hewitt 1998).

The rejection of disasters as determined by natural or technological agents has lead to a strong focus on vulnerability in academia as well as amongst practitioners (Hewitt 1998, Oliver-Smith 2002:27-29, Olwig 2009). In North American anthropology, hurricane Katrina which struck the city of New Orleans in 2005 appears to have caused an increased interest in disaster studies and vulnerability as the number of conferences and articles on the subject demonstrate (see for example Dickinson 2007, Ethridge 2006, Henry 2011, Ullberg 2010). Illustrating how vulnerability in affected areas and populations is unequally distributed along lines of gender, class and ethnicity is an important focus of these recent disaster studies which also discuss how disasters can expose the stratified structure of a society or local community, affecting the poor, marginalized and disempowered and thus manifesting inequality and uneven distribution of vulnerability. As noted, the vulnerability focus was very evident during my time with humanitarian agencies in Geneva in 2009.

The conceptualising of disaster as a conjuncture between physical agent and social vulnerability has also been decisive in forming a more processional approach to the study of disasters (Hewitt 1998:80, Oliver-Smith 2002:23-24). An analytical approach to "communities" or "societies" as fundamentally stable, self contained units of social equilibrium has long been criticised in anthropology, and as noted by anthropologist Frida Hastrup: "To be sure, the assumption of an underlying condition of stability, to which social-ecological systems impacted by disaster can return by way of adaptation and reorganization, can rightly be labelled as out of date" (F. Hastrup 2009:115). Recent anthropology of disasters is instead approaching the topic from a processual perspective and not as an extraordinary event which disturbs some existing social equilibrium (F. Hastrup 2009:115, Oliver-Smith & Hoffman 1999:5, Anderskov 2004:17-25)

Hoffman and Oliver-Smith argue that disasters in their disruptive elements and exposure of structures of vulnerability and inequalities bring potential for significant social change (Hoffman & Oliver-Smith 2002:9, Hoffman 1999b). Others warn against neglecting processes of continuity by overemphasising the potentials for change in disasters. Citing resent research on the subject of disaster and social change as well as ethnographic material on the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, anthropologist Jacques Henry argues that considerable continuity persist

in risk exposure, inequality, residential patterns and ideological frames making the likelihood of significant social change appear limited. Henry qualifies this statement somewhat by underlining that an analytical focus on continuity does not mean return to neo-functionalists assertions that all things will eventually be restored to some desirable and stable condition temporarily disrupted by disaster. Henry's aim is thus not so much a rejection of the possibility of social change, but a reminder not to take change for granted in post disaster situations and thus overlook underlining continuity (Henry 2011).

Whether or not actual and significant change takes place after disasters is, of course, largely determined by how the concept of change is defined in the relevant context and. To the question whether or not disasters bring significant social change, Susanna Hoffman proposes the ambiguous answer "no, but also decidedly yes" (Hoffman 1999b:319), arguing that though radical alteration of social organisation is rare, more delicate shifts of new relationships, perspectives and values frequently occur. I will explore the question of post tsunami change and continuity in more depth throughout this thesis.

The theoretical approach in this thesis is to study disasters as a part and product of everyday social, economic and cultural life. The tsunami is, quite obviously, a physical and potentially very destructive agent hitting a local population, but as I will argue, tsunami impact, experience and response as well as post tsunami change is closely connected to other and prior developments, conditions and concerns. I thus take a processual view of disasters and aim to explore the disaster within a larger context of the affected population's everyday life.

1.5.2 Resilience, agency and symbolic interpretations

Some recent anthropological studies of human responses to climate change and disasters have shifted emphasis from the concept of vulnerability to that of resilience (F. Hastup 2009, K. Hastrup 2009, Rubow 2009). As noted by anthropologist Cecilie Rubow:

> "Current studies in the social sciences of human reactions to climate change and natural hazards have taken an interesting turn from concepts of 'risk' and 'vulnerability' indicating ideas about potential loss or shortcomings to concepts of 'adaptation', 'sustainability', and 'resilience' denoting more creative aspects of societal responses" (Rubow 2009:94).

According to Rubow, the concept of resilience is promising as it opens up for a more dynamic theorizing of human agency and ability to adapt to and mitigate environmental changes and

natural hazards. According to anthropologist Frida Hastrup, vulnerability focused studies tend to identify and focus on structures of vulnerability, often neglecting the creative abilities of so-called vulnerable populations to respond to risk and disasters. Hastrup defines resilience not as something residing primarily within systems or structures, but a fundamental element of human agency and, like disasters, resilience must be analysed as a temporal phenomenon and not only as a particular aspect of an isolated event (F. Hastrup 2009:115-116).

A central argument of this thesis will be that attentiveness to local interpretations of disasters is important in gaining an understanding of disaster response by members of an affected population. By the term "local interpretations", I do not mean local in any geographically defined sense in opposition to "global" understandings or interpretations expressed by individuals believed to be more "local" than others. I simply refer to understandings and interpretations articulated by inhabitants of disaster affected areas, e.g. in my study the interpretations and understandings by those who experienced the tsunami and is now living in its aftermath.

Anthropological disaster research has illustrated how disasters are interpreted symbolically and how myths and symbols are used in local understandings of the disaster and post disaster recovery (Hoffman 1999a & 2002, Jencson 2001). Based on classical ritual theory of Victor Turner and Arnold Van Gennep, anthropologist Linda Jencson argues that disasters resemble liminal phases of rites of passage in a number of ways, creating a sense of communitas through symbols, shared labour, physical pain, reversing of hierarchy and re-enacting of traditional myths. Exploring the relationship between stress, ritual, disaster and communitas, Jencson argue that ritualising disaster response serves important functions in disaster recovery:

> "Ritual is a profoundly effective tool for the alleviations of stress. So people create sets of symbols and a mythos of culture heroes, supernatural powers, miraculous feats, visions and messengers from God. They place themselves within that mythos, redefining themselves by the symbol set, and by doing so, they take action." (Jencson 2001:56).

Susanna Hoffman also underlines the importance of studying the use of symbols in people's response to disaster and post disaster behaviour, arguing that "symbols are, in the first place highly pertinent to a people's reaction to disaster. Symbols influence shared behaviour" (Hoffman 2002:115). Referring to the metaphor of "bricolage" with the bricklayer, who has only so many bricks at hand and must improvise solutions for various recurrent repair as they

arise, used by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss to illustrate how societies combine and recombine cultural symbols, Hoffman argues that disasters are interpreted using already existing cultural symbols: "Faced with critical and novel issues on both physical and conceptual planes, they grab images from within the stock of their tradition and employ them for erratic and urgent demands" (ibid:125). Disasters initially pose a potential challenge to people's world-view, creating a need to reconstruct a sense of cultural meaning and order by explaining the disaster through already existing symbols and cosmology (ibid:114). I will return to the process of making sense of disaster in chapter 5.

1.6 Studying tradition - inventions and inversions

Later in this thesis, I explore local interpretations of the tsunami and post tsunami religious change in relation to concepts of tradition and *fa'asamoa*. In the following, I present some anthropological perspectives on the concept of tradition as well as account for the use of the concept in a Samoan context.

Historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) analyse how traditions are strategically invented and establish continuity with a selected representation of the past in the dynamics of identity construction in for example nation states. This analytical approach to tradition has been highly influential in anthropological research. Hobsbawm and Ranger has, however, been criticised for equating invention with inauthenticity, thus establishing a problematic analytical opposition between "real" and invented traditions, the former being unconscious continuations and the latter results of strategic intentionality of elites (Kvaale 2004:306-309). As argued by anthropologist Jacqueline Ryle, this approach is unable to explain simultaneous existence of seemingly contradictory practices of continuity and change without judging one as false or inauthentic. Ryle instead advocates a more processual and creative perspective on tradition emphasizing with Wagner (1975) the fluidity and continuous construction of culture with tradition being continually invented, but no less real (Ryle 2001:41-42).

1.6.1 Constructing tradition in the pacific

In an analysis of constructions of the past and conceptions of culture and tradition in the Pacific, anthropologist Roger Keesing argues that Pacific islanders represent, practice and idolize conceptions of culture, past and tradition as counters to or commentaries on an intrusive and dominant colonial culture, selecting, shaping and celebrating the elements of

their own traditions which most strikingly differentiate them from that of the colonisers (Keesing 1989:5, 28-30). Not unlike, and in Keesing's argument influenced by, the conceptualising of culture in functionalist anthropology as a timeless equilibrium of social coherence and integration, Keesing argues that an ideologically constructed Pacific past essentialises the idea of culture and tradition as timeless characteristics of what separates "us" from "them" (ibid:34). Keesing emphasises the dual and dialectic nature of this process of colonizers and colonized in the construction of Pacific pasts and identity, similar to more recent processes of cultural constructions in the tourism industry where the Pacific is represented as a fantasy land for Western audiences and consumers (ibid:33).

This focus on the importance of colonialism in defining cultural identity and tradition in the Pacific is partly rejected by anthropologist Jocelyn Linnekin who argues that cultural construction and invention are symbolic processes characteristic of all social life, not limited to so-called modernity and post colonial identity construction. This view thereby counters an Orientalist view of the Pacific as unchanging islands of ancient and authentic tradition, only interrupted by the arrival of European colonisers and missionaries (Linnekin 1992:253).

Anthropologist Nicholas Thomas argues that although colonialism was not alone in creating objectification of practices and tradition to define national or cultural identity, colonial contacts did involve constructions of Pacific cultures, different from and more radical than encounters of pre-colonial times (Thomas 1992:217). In defining tradition in opposition to western colonisers, missionaries and traders, some practices and values were codified and others de-legitimized and even stigmatized. Both Keesing and Thomas thus argue that tradition and identity are not simply different from but also constituted in opposition to others, thus asking not *how* but *against what* traditions are invented and in what ways the recognition of others and selves make particular practices emblematic of whole ways of life (ibid:216).

Linnekin underlines that though drawing on images of the past, tradition is symbolically produced or constructed in the present: "tradition is a selective representation of the past, fashioned in the present, responsive to contemporary priorities and agendas, and politically instrumental" (Linnekin 1992:251). Thomas also argues that tradition is "not just a burden that must be carried, but also a thing that can be acted upon or deployed to diverse ends" (Thomas 1992:227). Constructions of tradition is not thus only idealized, it is also enacted, and in some cases acted against and rejected. Thomas warns against assuming that people have positive

attitudes towards constructions and objectifications of the culture or tradition that they are supposed to represent: "My main point, then, is a very simple one: that if a set of meanings is objectified and named - as the custom of the place, or the Samoan way, for example - then it is possible to take a variety of stances toward that reification" (ibid:214). With examples of Seventh Day Adventism in Fiji, Thomas argues that as the dominant Methodist Church is closely associated with tradition, dissent and opposition to codification and objectifications of tradition has been expressed in changing church affiliation (ibid:224-227). I will explore this topic of critique and opposition to tradition in chapter 7.

1.6.2 Emic and etic understandings of tradition in Samoa

According to anthropologist Sean Mallon, Samoan understandings of tradition are encapsulated in the concept of *fa'asamoa* as a set of cultural values and practices. While advocating seemingly unchanging practices and ideals, the *fa'asamoa* is continuously being reinterpreted and changed to deal with changing political and social issues (Mallon 2010:365-366). In a similar way, anthropologist Bradd Shore argues that Samoans are eager to represent *fa'asamoa* as a coherent entity, toning down the many local differences and inherent conflicts:

> "Stubbornly idiosyncratic and local in their understandings of culture and notoriously unable to agree among themselves about almost anything significant in their day-to-day cultural life, Samoans nonetheless insist on representing themselves to outsiders as a coherent, unified cultural entity." (Brad Shore 2000:6).

Samoan tradition and *fa'asamoa* is in this thesis approached as something continuously being reinvented, constructed and negotiated. I will not try to establish what tradition consists of as an objective entity, but focus on how understandings of tradition are used and responded to and possibly against by various actors in my field. In her studies of representations of tradition in a Hawaiian context, Linnekin argues that tradition can be defined as a normative model for daily conduct (Linnekin 1992:251), and I also found that my informants frequently referred to tradition and *fa'asamoa* when discussing everyday behaviour, morality and traditional practices.

The concepts of culture, tradition and the *fa'asamoa* were frequently used emic concepts, which my informants seemed to use almost interchangeably and I do not presume to fully understand the diversity of conceptions of these emic terms, especially as I do not speak sufficiently Samoan to understand the meanings of corresponding indigenous terms. The term *fa'asamoa*, literally meaning "the Samoan way", incorporates traditional practices, the chiefly

system, social etiquette and a number of values underpinning these practices (Huffer & So'o 2005:312). When asked directly what *fa'asamoa* meant, my informants often responded in rather normative ways, stating that the *fa'asamoa* was about respect, love and sharing. This thesis applies a broad definition of *fa'asamoa* as a conception of Samoan ways and culture according to notions of tradition, the chiefly system and general social organisation as well as central values and ideas. I will explore conceptions of *fa'asamoa* in more depth in chapter 3.

1.7 Overview of the thesis

In this introductory chapter, the general context, research question and some theoretical perspectives of the thesis has been presented. Chapter 2 gives an account of the fieldwork, discussing methodological approaches used to generate relevant data and some challenges encountered. The following chapter 3 provides a contextualizing background for understanding key elements of social organisation, governance, economy and religion in Samoa in general and in the two villages of my study in particular. Chapter 4 will present my empirical findings on the religious changes in Salesi after the tsunami. The new churches will be presented and some key beliefs and practices accounted for, while the latter part of the chapter will explore how the new churches were established in the tsunami aftermath and how they have been involved in aid and recovery activities.

Various local perceptions of the tsunami as expressed by different informants will be presented in chapter 5. As religious interpretations have been prominent in my informant's accounts, they will also be so here, though the co-existence of religious and scientific explanations will also be discussed. Chapter 6 analyses how differently positioned individuals act upon religious understandings of the disaster and make use of them in negotiations of post tsunami religious change. Chapter 7 will explore how members of new churches identify themselves in relation and opposition to concepts and values of tradition and *fa'asamoa*, discussing new churches as a possible inversion and rejecting of tradition. In the closing chapter, I propose some conclusions on the topics local understandings of disaster, post disaster social change and the role of anthropology in disaster research and recovery.

Tsunami destruction and reconstruction. Church destroyed and partly rebuilt in the tsunami affected area

Victims of the tsunami buried outside the frame of an old open style Samoa *fale* and a newly erected European style house.

2 Methodology

In this chapter, I account for the methods used to generate relevant data to answer the research question posed, as well as some methodological challenges encountered and reflections made on research position and ethical considerations.

2.1 Setting the scene: field and informants

Samoan villages are bounded by land and population as geographical and political units as well as important sources of (self)identification. In some respects, what I constitute as "the field" of my ethnographic research is quite clearly localized and geographically defined as two neighbouring villages, Levao and Salesi, which constitute the ethnographic location where I conducted the majority of my fieldwork.

As noted in a critical analysis by anthropologists Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, conceptions of "the field" in anthropology as a neatly bounded entity existing "out there" in a limited geographical area does not capture the complex interconnections, interactions and flows of people, goods and ideas (Gupta & Ferguson 1997:6). The seemingly localized villages of rural Samoa are also highly connected to both capital city and overseas countries, mainly through out and back migration and the flow of remittances (Macpherson & Macpherson 2009:3-4). Though distinctively local, Samoan rural villages are thus also markedly global. As this thesis will point to, the increased presence and missionary activities of new churches in Samoa is one manifestation of the involvements of rural villages with global processes of change. Studying a disaster and its aftermath is also both highly globalised with the involvement of international organisations, aid and aid workers and international media coverage, and highly localised, as disasters strike in local, geographical areas and affect the population there (Hoffman & Oliver-Smith 2002:13).

2.1.1 Informants

My informants were between the ages of 17 and 65 with the majority in their 30s and 40s, approximately equally divided in terms of gender. When choosing informants in the villages, my aim was to avoid limiting myself to a particular category of people in order to build a network of differently positioned individuals to get a broad and nuanced impression of perceptions of the tsunami and experiences of post tsunami change from various viewpoints.

In categorizing informants, Russell Bernard distinguishes between key and specialised informants, the former defined as people with whom the ethnographer often builds close relationships and who also give access to valuable data, whereas specialized informants have expert knowledge in some particular cultural domain (Bernard 2006:196-201, Sanjec 1990:399). Pastors were often specialized informants for the purposes of my study, knowing doctrines and religious practices of their particular denomination intimately. Through my fieldwork, I built friendly relationships with the pastors of most both new and mainline churches; some I visited in their homes, occasionally ate with them and became acquainted with their families. I was, however, also conscious not to be too closely associated with pastors as this might place me too firmly within one religious group and thus both limit my access to other arenas and influence the nature of the data, I would gain access to.

I define three of my informants, all of them women, as key informants. The youngest of these was *Filia*, a 29 year old mother of three, teacher of geography at the secondary school in Levao and also a core member of a newly established church in Salesi. Filia and her husband were clearly among the wealthier families in Salesi with a large, Western style house, a small car and financial means to take trips to Apia and treat the children to dinners at a Western fast food restaurant. Filia took control of our relationship early on, often dictating me on how to behave and what to think. She was also among those of my informants who first and most frequently introduced religious topics to our conversations, and proudly told me that others made fun of her by calling her "*an angel*" because of her strong preoccupation with religious matters.

Kolone, my host mother, was 46 years old and mother of 13 children, which naturally took up much of her time. Her husband was a middle ranking *matai* who worked hard on the family taro plantation, which provided food and a moderate income for the family. The expenses, however, often exceeded the family income as 7 children were attending primary or secondary school with considerable school fees and expenses for uniforms, and making ends meet was a continuous challenge. The family attended the Catholic church in Salesi, and Kolone was very concerned with fulfilling her responsibilities to both church and to her vast extended family as well as uphold strict moral codes of conduct for herself and her children.

My third key informant was *Lani*, an elderly woman living in Levao and a member of the Congregational church. Frequently, Lani referred to herself as a "*very traditional person*" and

often appeared preoccupied with what she referred to as "*the proper way*" with everyone following village rules and chiefly hierarchies. Lani took a liking to me early on, and I was often invited to join her family for dinner and *lotu* (evening prayer) and sometimes I spent the night. My conversations with Lani have been vital in understanding village traditions, hierarchies and what is considered proper practice of *fa'asamoa*. Lani was, however, much more than just a stereotype of an elderly, traditional Samoan. She amongst other things looked forward to having internet in the village one day, so that she could "*connect to the world*" and perhaps as she had four children working and studying overseas, was very knowledgeable of the English language, international political developments and global news. Despite being past retirement age, Lani also worked as a principal of the secondary school in Levao, which she ruled in a very disciplinary manner, emphasizing that she did things the "*traditional village ways*" and if anyone didn't like it, they could move to Apia.

I often felt that my informants and especially my key informants tried to control who I interviewed and with whom I socialised. Kolone often advised me against talking to particular young women who she believed to be promiscuous and therefore "*bad company*" and as one informant of the Congregational church in Salesi exclaimed when I said I was off to speak to a member of one of the new churches: "*Those are not good people for you to talk to. What they will tell you are all lies! You should better talk to my pastor, he will tell you everything*". I often felt that knowing my informants' view of each other provided me with insights into the relationships between differently positioned individuals and groups, especially regarding new and mainline churches and into the alliances and animosities in my field.

2.2 Living Samoan family life

Through a member of staff at the Centre for Samoan Studies at the National University of Samoa, I was introduced to a branch of his extended family living in Levao. Having received several invitations to stay with families in the affected area, and turned some down for both methodological and personal reasons, I accepted the invitation from Kolone's family who in addition to being welcoming and kind towards me also seemed respected and was by other inhabitants of the two villages described as a "*typical good Samoan family*".

Living closely with a family gave me insights into the daily life, routines and living conditions of the population in the affected area. Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod argues that in a society where kinship defines most relationships, it seems most natural for the

anthropologist to become a part of a family, thus gaining "a role as a fictive kin person in order to participate" (Abu-Lughod 1988:15). Being associated with a local and respected family also had great importance for how I was received in the villages. Prior to my arrival to Samoa there had been a case of a New Zealand journalist reporting on drug related gang violence in Samoa. Reacting strongly against what was considered lies and misrepresentations, the case had been publicly refused and denied by Samoan authorities (One News 06/09/2009, Island Business 27/04/2010)[6]. Kolone told me of a *palagi* (white, Western) woman who had come to the village and asked questions about living conditions after the tsunami, but everyone had flatly refused to talk to her. According to Kolone, people had been anxious not to speak to anyone who might spread "*false news*" about Samoa to the rest of the world like the reported gang related violence. When I commented that I was glad people had not placed me in a category of journalists and refused to talk to me, Kolone exclaimed: "*Oh no, they don't think that about you, because they know that you stay here and that you are a part of this family*". Though being closely associated with a particular family might have influenced the data generated by placing me within a set of relationships of power, interests, alliances and animosities of which I was not fully aware, my relationship with the family has been very important in gaining accept and trust in the villages.

2.3 Primary methods for data generation

2.3.1 Participant observation

My objective has been to study the particular, e.g. interpretations of the tsunami and post tsunami change, through a holistic understanding of social, religious and economic life. I have attempted what James Spradley refers to as a compromise between surface and in-depth investigation by studying a few selected domains in depth, while still attempting to gain a surface understanding of the cultural scene as a whole (Spradley 1980:101).

Participant observation in various contexts of village life has been a key methodological approach and I participated in a number of joint village activities like village council (*fono*) meetings, practical labour and entertainments, as well as everyday routines of my host family. I also took the opportunities which came my way to participate in more ceremonial events such as a funeral and an inauguration ceremony for a new deacon of the Catholic church in

[6] The case was taken before the New Zealand Broadcasting Standards Authorities by the Attorney General of Samoa. The authorities ruled against Television New Zealand, which was ordered to make a public statement on the matter and pay fines of 7000 NZ$ (Island Business 08/03/2010, Broadcasting Standards Authorities 02/03/2010)

Salesi. As I during the course of my fieldwork identified the establishment of new churches as one of the most significant post tsunami changes, I made it a priority to participate in church services, Bible schools and other activities of both new and mainline churches. Most of my informants only rarely left the villages and I could therefore follow the same individuals in a variety of different contexts: religious, family and joint village activities.

I tried to balance observing and participating aspects of my presence in the field, aiming at passive, moderate and active participation depending on the context (Spradley 1980:60). However, my informants often seemed to have their own agenda with me and tried to control among other things my level of participation. In the daily life of my host family, I was often not allowed to participate in practical duties, instead they insisted that I just watched, ate something or slept, thus complying with norms of hospitality. While calling me "*daughter*" and "*sister*", they reacted strongly against me actually acting like one. In other contexts, I felt almost forced to participate, mainly in religious activities in the new churches when members or pastors would insist that I made a speech, sang a song or shared some religious experience from my past. During participation in a *fono* meeting, I was also pressured into performing a traditional Samoan dance for the *matais* (chiefs) and visiting members of the Government. In these situations, my attempts to refuse active participation were clearly not accepted, which I sometimes felt almost like a violation of my autonomy.

2.3.2 Interviews

Conducting ethnographic interviews has been a key methodological tool to generate data on local perceptions of the tsunami and post tsunami change. I conducted formal and informal, structured and unstructured interviews and many which I would define somewhere in between these categories. The majority of formal interviews were semi-structured with a prepared interview guide, but also leaving open the opportunity to follow leads and topics arising in the interview situation. I sometimes let my informants take control of the interview to see in which direction they wanted to take me as a conscious methodological approach, which Abu-Lughod describes as a non-directive approach, forming the inquiry around the matters which the informants find most interesting (Abu-Lughod 1988, see also Bernard 2006:216).

By letting my research focus to some extend be guided by what my informants articulated as important, some questions which I in the preparatory phase had expected to be important lost significance and others emerged. Preparing questions for interviews was thus a continuous

process and the nature and formulation of questions were adjusted according to context and, of course, whom I was interviewing. Open-ended descriptive questions and grand tour questions recurred in most interviews, and I used both what James Spradley terms typical questions ("what normally happens during a *fono* meeting?") and more specific grand and mini tour questions ("can you describe what happened on the day of the tsunami?") (Spradley 1979:87). Interviews conducted in the first phase of the fieldwork are characterized by these types of questions. Through the course of the fieldwork, the nature and formulation of interview questions changed to be more particular, especially if these topics had already come up in conversations or interviews and particularly in interviews with specialised informants.

The majority of interviews took place on the home ground of respondents, either in their own homes or at their work. Some interviews with religious leaders and church members also took place in or outside churches, church halls or travelling back and forth from religious activities. Conducting interviews in these religious settings is likely to have affected responses by drawing them in a more religious direction than might otherwise have been the case. I therefore made it a priority to conduct interviews with these informants in non-religious contexts as well. I only very rarely met new informants at church activities, but was invited by people I already knew, the religious setting thus not being the main determining factor for our relationship.

2.3.3 A note on language and translation

Samoan and English are both official languages in Samoa, which was felt most clearly in the capital city of Apia. After moving to the rural areas, English became less prevalent. I managed to learn some basic language skills, but being more proficient in the Samoan language would definitely have been advantageous. Due to the short duration of the fieldwork, I did, however, not consider learning Samoan beyond daily necessities very realistic. As noted by Margaret Mead, knowing even a little of the language, though not sufficient to conduct detailed interviews without interpretation, help significantly to establish rapport with informants, which I also experienced (Mead in Bernard 2006:361).

Many inhabitants of the two villages did speak English very well, but some, especially the older men, did not, and I felt that a part of the village population was out of my reach due to the language barrier. Finding a translator to help out in interviews proved to be more difficult than I had thought. The problem seemed to be, perhaps not surprisingly, that the ones with

good English skills were also the ones with least spare time, narrowing down the pool of possible translators significantly.

In the end, Kolone offered herself as translator and we conducted some interviews with elder *matais* together. Using Kolone as translator was clearly problematic in some ways, as the answers given by the people we interviewed together were probably affected by the relationships between her and the respondents. Also, Kolone was no experienced translator and sometimes forgot to translate and instead engaged in discussions with the respondent in Samoan. One advantage was, however, that I knew Kolone quite well at that point and besides her strong devotion to honesty, I knew her attitude to many of the topics of the interviews. When translating a response with which she did not agree, Kolone rolled her eyes at me, exclaiming apologetically: "*I'm sorry, but that's what he says!*". I took this as an indication that Kolone was translating truthfully to the best of her abilities, openly influencing her answers according to her own opinions so that it was at least clear to me what was her opinion was and what was the opinion of the interview respondent.

2.3.4 Fieldnotes, emotions and other sources of data

The written production of my fieldwork, e.g. the fieldnotes produced, has been a time consuming activity, and I sometimes felt that writing notes took up too much of my time, which I could instead have used for interviews or participant observations. However, besides being a crucial and indispensable part of ethnographic methodology, writing notes also gave me necessary breaks from village and family life, thus providing me with a form of escape when the field became too intrusive (see also Nielsen 1996:116). Loneliness and emotional reactions has been described in many methodological accounts and guides as a natural part of conducting fieldwork (Ely 1991:107-112, Nielsen 1996:180, Wax 1971). Writing notes functioned for me as an emotional outlet and a way of expressing feelings of isolation and frustration which I felt I could not, and did not wish to, share with my informants. Some such emotions are in hindsight highly relevant as they influenced my relationships with informants. An example of this, which will be accounted for below, are my frustrations and feelings of affront towards the sexism and insults from some informants.

In addition to the primary ethnographic methods described above, I also used a number of secondary sources such as reports from the Samoan government, UNDP and other international agencies and I made a desk review of local newspapers from the time of the

tsunami and the following months, as well as other news media from outside Samoa, mainly from New Zealand and Australia. This type of data, which we might categorize as the non-participatory end of participant observation (Spradley 1980:59), helped build background knowledge of both the tsunami, religious change in Samoa and the general way of social organisation and governance nationally and locally.

2.4 Negotiation fieldwork position

As noted by anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup, what we as anthropologists can grasp during fieldwork depend upon what our informants are prepared to share with us (Hastrup in Steffen 1995:12). This, I believe, is highly dependent upon how the anthropologist is perceived and the roles and positions taken by and ascribed to the fieldworker. Anthropologist Cathrine Hasse underlines that fieldwork positions cannot simply be chosen by the fieldworker herself, but must be negotiated with various agents in the field according to their own perceptions and intentions. I also felt that my position was continuously being negotiated, which among other things was manifested in very practical matters, such as my levels of participation in various contexts and my position as somewhere between guest and family as noted above.

As has been described in fieldwork literature, especially on the role of women fieldworkers, I found that my personal qualities and attributes influenced the nature of my relationships with informants and on which informants and what data I gained access to (Hasse 1995:61; Wax 1971:47, Adu-Lughod 1988, Nielsen 1996:59). Being a young unmarried woman thus did not make an obvious starting point for building close relationships with the elderly male *matais* and my closest relations in the villages were undoubtedly with women.

Being a *palagi* was also an important part of how I was perceived. My informants clearly had presumptions about me as a representative of what considered *palagi* culture, and it was sometimes hinted at that I, being a *palagi,* must be selfish, closed off, concerned with material things, that I probably did not care much for my parents and sometimes even that I must be promiscuous. Though frustrating at times, these initial, and rather negative, conceptions of me as a representative of *palagi* culture gave me insights into the way Samoan cultural identity was constructed in opposition to conceptions of the *fa'apalagi* (*palagi* ways or culture).

Cathrine Hasse notes that the fieldworker often has several different roles, some consciously acquired and some ascribed by others, and that it is possible to alternate between them to gain

access to different sources of information and being accepted by different informants (Hasse 1995:54). I also experienced having several roles and positions, as I could both participate in a rather powerless and informal position as a young unmarried woman and from a more privileged and prestigious position as a *palagi* researcher from a Western university, with a background at the UNDP and some contacts in the Samoan government. When seeking out information at the main offices of mainline Churches or in the government administration, I certainly was better received than had I been an average young Samoan woman with kind secretaries showing me directly to leaders, president and chief executing officers (CEO) who were surprisingly welcoming with information. My position was thus not without ambiguities and therefore also open for negotiations.

In many situations I assumed what Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson describe as the role of an acceptable incompetent, convenient to me as it gave me a point of departure to ask questions, but also as my informants often responded positively to this role (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007:79). I found that when presenting myself as a researcher of a Western university, people would often become shy and nervous, stating that they did not know anything and that I should rather speak to their *matais*, pastors or elders in the family. By treating my informants as cultural experts, making my own ignorance obvious, they often seemed to relax more which made conversations and interviews both more productive and more comfortable for both parties.

2.4.1 Participation and positioning in religious contexts

It had been my initial intention not to position myself as a member of any religious denomination and appear neutral on religious topics in order not to influence the data generated more than necessary. Claiming a neutral position with regards to religious convictions, however, turned out a rather naive undertaking. People often demanded to know my religious dispositions ("*what is your church?*") and my initial attempts to evade such questions were not accepted. I sometimes ended up answering that I was a member of the "Danish Folk Church"[7], which I am albeit a very passive one, defining the protestant majority church in my home country, which seemed a satisfactory answer to most informants.

Participant observation in religious settings also posed an ethical challenge, as my informants frequently seemed to take for granted that I shared their religious beliefs, though I was careful

[7] "Den Danske Folkekirke", Protestant Lutheran national Church of Denmark.

to emphasise that I was there out of academic rather than spiritual interest. I believe that these assumptions by especially core members of new churches helped build rapport and I was often surprised at their frank and trusting manner towards me. In fact, I do not consider myself religious and I would certainly not be considered so by my informants had we had discussions about my personal attitude to biblical interpretations. I did my best to avoid such discussions as I felt it would remove focus from the topics that I did wish to discuss and as I feared it might jeopardise my relationships with members of the new churches.

According to anthropologist Finn Sivert Nielsen, not only do informants often forget about our role as researches, the fieldworker also works actively to make this happen (Nielsen 1996:109). I sometimes felt I was walking a thin line of not telling untruths and not correcting what I sometimes felt were misconceptions by my informants when they assumed that I shared their religious views and that I was "one of them". When feeling uncomfortable with what might be termed "passive deception" (Bernard 2006:443-444), I tried to make my non-religious convictions and position more clear.

2.5 Joking, lying and the problem of remaining unmarried

Some personal accounts of being in the field deserve attention as I believe it has influenced the data generated and, especially, the data *not* generated. As noted by anthropologist Bradd Shore, joking is of great social importance in Samoa among all age groups and on all levels of the social hierarchy (Shore 1995:145-147). Joking and laughing were often emphasised by my informants as being characteristic of Samoan culture and it appeared to be an important element in most social interactions. In the beginning, I found the humour difficult to reciprocate and sometimes difficult to accept when the joke, as was often the case, was on me. Getting insulted and angry, I quickly learned, would get me nowhere if I wanted to get along and after learning some basic rules of joking, I found that building rapport was significantly easier if I managed to make people laugh.

Sometimes joking took the form of making me believe in lies, which was of course a potentially serious disadvantage for me as a fieldworker. I caught many informants telling lies, often very banal ones like claiming they were not married, if indeed they were, or that they had been overseas, when in fact they had not. It was my impression though, that people mostly lied about topics which they found amusing, such as sexual and romantic relations, which were not topics of targeted ethnographic interest to me.

I encountered sexual jokes or joking about what local men I might marry in a surprising variety of contexts, though I had made it clear early on that I was engaged and interested in nothing of the sort. For instance, a pastor made rather rude sexual jokes about me and a young man sitting next to me in the middle of his Sunday service in front of the entire congregation, and I experienced more than once that elderly *matais* joked about having a sexual relationship with me at *fono* meetings. Besides making me uncomfortable, the sexual joking also had influence on whom I had close relationships with as the constant joking and sexual explicitness towards me often made it awkward talking to men, especially the unmarried ones, who were either very shy with me or very flirtatious. I also got the impression that some men told me whatever they believed I might find most interesting, which was a problematic point of departure for conducting an ethnographically relevant interview.

2.6 Ethical considerations - conveying research standards and anonymity

In both methodological approach and in writing the thesis, I follow the argument by Spradley that protecting the interests and identity of informants ought to be a deciding concern (Spradley 1980:21-25). Still, as Halvard Vike (2001) points out, anonymity should not be applied too broadly if it means changing and distorting the material to the degree it becomes irrelevant. A balance between these two principles has been attempted in my fieldwork and in the written thesis.

When introducing myself to potential informants, I tried to make my purposes and standards clear, especially regarding anonymity and the nature of the research, e.g. that I was independent of national, religious and economic organisations and interests, that I would use the information for my master's thesis in anthropology and that I would protect identities and make everyone anonymous. However, people generally seemed entirely indifferent to this, often looking away or simply starting to talk about something else. Moreover, most of my informants did not want to be anonymous. Some simply stated that anonymity was not an option in Samoa, referring to the open style houses and communal living: "*Have you seen how we live? This is the village, your business is everybody's business!*". Others were explicitly opposed to me not using their real names. Malia, a 25 year-old daughter of my host family, thus told me that "*you better use our real names otherwise it's not fair!*", implying that with the hospitality they were showing me they ought also get the acknowledgement they deserved for it.

The way I presented myself and tried to make the terms of research clear to potential informants also sometimes seemed an obstacle to building rapport, making informants uncomfortable and the situation very stiff and unnatural. When conduction an interview with Tao, a young Samoan volunteer at the Red Cross, he reacted strongly to the talk of anonymity and my other opening statements and reassurances, exclaiming: "*Like when we talked on the phone last night, and you said you were gonna ask me some questions, I was like cool. And now you're explaining me all these things, and I'm like 'oh shit - now I'm panicking'. Now I'm damned shaky!*". Tao's strong reactions were probably partly due to the shift from what had been a joking and casual friendship to a relationship between interviewer and respondent. In the following interviews, I was conscious not to make this shift, which I felt was ethically necessary to inform my informants of the research, too marked and contrasting to my general relationship with the informant.

Sometimes I might have gone too far in making the interview pleasing to the respondent, as some seemed almost too excited by the situation, like one elderly female informant exclaiming: "*Oh such a very nice time for us, this! I'm so happy we have this talk! So wonderful for us!*". I felt that I might sometimes have encouraged the informants too much with smiles, nods and other silent expressions of agreement, thus signalling an agreement which I did not necessary feel.

3 Chiefs, churches and tradition: *fa'asamoa* and social organisation in a Samoan village.

In this chapter, some central elements of social organisation and *fa'asamoa* will be accounted for. The first part will explore secular elements of governance and economy, focusing on the chiefly system of *matais (fa'amatai),* local economy and exchange as well as some central values underpinning conceptions of the *fa'asamoa*. The latter part of the chapter focuses on religious aspects of church organisation, economy and the role of pastors in social organisation and hierarchies. As will be illustrated, secular and religious spheres are highly interconnected and Christianity is considered a central and inherent element of *fa'asamoa*.

3.1 Governance and village organisation

Governance in Samoa is made up by a dual system of village based governance of *matais* and a national parliamentary style democratic government. The following describes some core principles and practices of the *fa'amatai* and how it relates to the national level governance.

3.1.1 Village level *fa'amatai* and social organisation

Village governance is based on kinship groups, each family being represented by one or more *matais* in the *fono* (village council). A *matai* is appointed by members of the extended family to represent and promote the interests of the family in various political forums. Titleholders are chosen from a pool of candidates within the extended family and titles are thus not hereditary in a strict sense from father to son but open for negotiation and contestation (Macpherson & Macpherson 2009:122-123, Mow 2007:122-124, Shore 1982:65-66). In principle, women are as eligible for titles as men; in practice, however, most *matais* are men. On a national level, approximately 20 % of titles are bestowed on women (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2008:22), and in Levao and Salesi, I knew of only one female *matai*, who rarely attended and always kept quiet at *fono* meetings.

At the village level, the *fono* constitutes both the legislative, judiciary and executing power and the *matais* meet regularly, in Levao and Salesi generally biweekly, to discuss political, economic and moral matters of the respective villages (Macpherson & Macpherson 2009:14, Huffer & So'o 2005:311). Managing resources and maintaining order and harmony are considered main responsibilities of the *matais* and the *fono* establishes village rules and

imposes punishments on those who do not comply. Often these rules cover dress and appearances, general behaviour and moral conduct including sexual behaviour, alcohol consumption and religious matters such as mandatory church attendance and the number of churches allowed. Punishments for violations are most often monetary fines payable to the *fono* and/or a number of pigs to be killed and divided between the *matais.* In cases of repeated offences or open challenges to the authority of the *fono*, perpetrators might face expulsion from the village or even be subjected to acts of violence ordered by the *fono*, though this is officially prohibited in national legislation (Human Rights Council 2011:15, So'o 2006:159-161, Legislative Assembly of Western Samoa in Parliament 1990).

The *matais* of the *fono* are ranked in a complex hierarchical system with the relative ranks manifested and negotiated in both daily and ceremonial life and through authority in *fono* decisions (Shore 1982:71-72). Village life is generally organised in groups of gender and rank, each having responsibilities to fulfil. The *taulele'a* (young or untitled men) are referred to as the strength (*malosi*) of the village and do work ordered by the *fono*, including all manual labour needed in the village and generally giving service (*tautua*) to the *matais* (So'o 2006:155, Huffer & So'o 2005:318). The women of the village are organised in Women's Committees, whose responsibilities it is to uphold cleanliness and presentability of the village, promote health, feed and entertain visitors and conduct yearly inspections of household equipment in all village households (Grattan 1949:20-21, Shore 1982:102-103). In the Committee, my female informants of Levao told me, the women are ranked according to the relative ranks of their husbands.

The *fa'amatai* was considered one of the most important elements in the *fa'asamoa* by my informants who often seemed eager to emphasise that the *fa'amatai* was inherent to *fa'asamoa* and therefore constant, good and unchangeable. With the overall principles of the *fa'amatai* accounted for here, it is important to note that chiefly power is not a static system, but continuously enacted and transformed. Power and authority is continuously manipulated and renegotiated, by the *matais* themselves, their wives, or ambitious *taulele'a* wishing to assume a powerful title, the relative ranks thus not being entirely fixed in a hierarchical system, but subject to competition and strategizing between families (Mageo 1989:413, Shore 1995:159-176).

3.1.2 Connecting central and local governance.

Central and local governance is officially interconnected as only individuals holding *matai* titles are eligible for Parliament and until 1991, only *matais* possessed voting power in national elections. Today, universal suffrage applies for all Samoans over the age of 21 (Mow 2007:125-130).

The authority of the village *fono* was confirmed by the Samoan government in the Village Fono Act of 1990, which officially acknowledges the history and legitimacy of *fono* authority to maintain law and order, manage community developments, establish rules and impose punishments locally, and the Act thus strengthened the authority of the *fono*. In cases of serious crime committed in a village, the offender is most often reported to the national police and tried in the national court system. Any punishment by the *fono* is taken into consideration by the court and the punishment here generally lowered if the offender had already been penalized by the *fono* (Macpherson & Macpherson 2009:14, Legislative Assembly of Western Samoa in Parliament 1990, Chan Mow 2007:130).

Since gaining independence in 1962 and the establishment of a national parliamentary governance system, Samoa has signed a number of United Nations conventions and declarations, and the national legal system and legislation protect individual rights in accordance with international conventions and declarations. Individuals who disagree with *fono* decisions can take the case in question to court to be tried on the basis of national legislation (Legislative Assembly of Western Samoa in Paliament:8,11).

3.2 Local economies, exchange and obligations

All land in Samoa is by law classified as either customary, freehold or public land. Customary land, generally referred to as *"family land"* is considered inalienable and cannot be sold, and is owned and managed by the extended family with the family *matai* as the protector and trustee. The vast majority of land is customary (81%), while 11 percent is owned by the Government, 5 percent by Churches and other private owners and the remaining 3 percent is freehold land, mainly located in the Apia urban area. In Levao and Salesi, as in most rural areas, all land is customary and church owned land (Ernst 2006:539, Teule'alo 2003).

Family land is primarily used for plantations, providing important taro, coconuts and bananas for domestic consumption and in some families also as cash crops. Families in rural areas are

largely self-sufficient for basic foods, but many prefer to buy imported tinned fish, canned meat or frozen chicken from small locally owned shops. Only a minority of the population in the area of my study was in paid employment, 15 percent according to government statistics (Government of Samoa 2009a:15), and there was generally not much cash circulating in the villages apart from remittances from family working overseas. Remittances contribute significantly to local economies, accounting for approximately 20 percent of gross domestic product (Macpherson & Macpherson 2009:3-4, Thornton et al. 2010:5-7) and were vital sources of cash income for many of my informants.

A recurrent cause for both pride and concern amongst my informants were ceremonial life-crisis events in the extended family, such as funerals, weddings or entitlement ceremonies for new *matais (saofa'i)*. Referred to as *fa'alavelave* or family affairs, literally meaning burden or "to make entangled" (Mageo 1991:414), members of the extended family were expected to donate money, pigs, tinned fish or beef and weaved fine mats (*'ie toga*) to relatives hosting the event, the size of donations varying according to the closeness of the relation, the nature of the ceremony and the status and rank of the people involved (Mageo 1991:141). During the ceremonial event, donations were presented publicly, often accompanied by loud noises and yelling by the giving party. After presenting the gifts, the roles would change and the receiving party give back money, tinned fish, food or fine mats to the donating party, again based on rank, social standing and closeness of the relation with pastors and high ranking *matais* generally receiving a large portion of the donations.

My informants referred to *fa'alavelave* as "*donations*" and "*gifts*", given to help the families arranging the ceremony, but the expectations to "*get something back*" was equally emphasised. Bradd Shore refers to *fa'alavelave* ceremonies as direct symmetrical exchange, in which people expect their gifts to be reciprocated. The publicity of the exchange also invites a competitive element: "The competitive nature of such exchanges is evident in the highly charged atmosphere of the redistribution, where tempers are sometimes short and memories always long" (Shore 1982:207). As will be accounted for in the following, competition and monetisation has caused an increase in *fa'alavelave* expectations and expenses.

3.2.1 Increasing expenses for *fa'alavelave*

Ioana Chan Mow, Dean of the Faculty of Social Science at the National University of Samoa and holder of a prominent *matai* title, notes in a comparison of family funerals in the 1960s

and today both a marked increase in the contributions expected and an increasing monetisation of the donations, replacing cultural wealth such as weaved fine mats with presentations of cash donations (Mow 2007:127-8). A similar tendency is noted by A. Morgan Tuimaleali'ifano, also a Samoan *matai,* in an analysis of *fa'alavelave* expectations and costs for his own title bestowal. Tuimaleali'ifano expresses both surprise and indignation at the apparent greed of the *fono*, demanding large amounts of money and being openly dissatisfied when he failed to meet the requirements. As Mow, Tuimaleali'ifano observes an increasing monetisation of the *fa'alavelave*:

> "Customary gifts derived from a subsistence economy are less likely, these days, to satisfy the needs of a family and clan structure accustomed to cash and remittances (...) When food was gifted instead of cash, tropical climatic conditions required efficient redistribution. But when cash infiltrates gifting whether in the form of remittances or otherwise, redistribution it not required and gifting is taken out of the public into the private and individualised arena" (Tuimaleali'ifano 2006:370).

According to Tuimaleali'ifano, the preference of money over food and other local products causes less distribution, turning *fa'alavelave* into a more private than communal matter, caracterized by individual accumulation of wealth rather than distribution (ibid 368-371).

During my fieldwork, the topic of increasing expenses for *fa'alavelave* was frequently discussed in both government fora, at the UNDP and amongst residents in Levao and Salesi. Several of my key informants, including members of my host family, were often telling me about recurring hardships and frustrations about the demands for *fa'alavelave*. At the death of a rather distant, but high ranking *matai* of Kolones's extended family, the family was expected to make large monetary donations. Getting ready to go to Apia to discuss the amounts of donations with other branches of the extended family, Kolone told me with a tired smile, referring to a conversation the day before about the definition of *fa'asamoa*: "*You know, this is the fa'asamoa. Sometimes it's just too much!"* thus referring to *fa'alavelave* as an inherent and defining element of *fa'asamoa*. As mentioned earlier, Kolone and her family were almost constantly short of cash, and it was mainly the unexpected expenses for *fa'alavelave*, such as funerals, which posed difficulties.

The oldest daughter of my host family, Malia, earned the highest wages of the family working as an accountant in the government administration, and was therefore the one expected to cover the majority of expenses for *fa'alavelave.* Malia often expressed discontent with this,

telling me that she felt it was "*unfair*" and even that she "*hated the fa'asamoa*" which she described as being "*too hard*" and "*making people poor and miserable*". Malia and her husband had taken up rather big bank loans for their resent elaborate wedding, also a *fa'alavelave* occasion, and whenever unexpected expenses came up, they went to the bank to try and enlarge this loan with a few hundred tala at a time.

Some scholars argue that Samoans have become increasingly dependent on income support from relatives overseas to live up to rising expectations for *fa'alavalave*, making emigration an important economic strategy for many families (Macpherson & Macpherson 2009:94,146, Thornton et al. 2010). Many families in Levao and Salesi also depended on remittances for *fa'alavelave*. As Lani told me before going to a funeral *fa'alavelave*, she hadn't had any cash for the donations "*but then I just called my daughter in New Zealand and made her send me some money. You see, that's the Samoan way*". She laughed at this, perhaps seeing the irony in money from overseas being an indispensable part of Samoan tradition.

3.3 Constructing tradition and the *fa'asamoa*: communality and continuity

As noted in chapter 1.6, concepts of tradition and *fa'asamoa* were frequently used emic concepts. In the following, I explore conceptions and representations of *fa'asamoa* and tradition amongst my informants.

Generally, the concepts of tradition and *fa'asamoa* were referred to using definite articles as *the* traditional ways and *the fa'asamoa*. When asked to define *fa'asamoa*, my informants seemed eager to emphasise this as a coherent and unchangeable entity, made up by respect (*fa'aaloalo*), the *fa'amatai*, communal living and sharing, strong family ties and the Christian faith. Certain parts of Samoa were also considered more "*real Samoan*" and "*traditional*" than others. In the beginning of my fieldwork, I was frequently told that if I had come to learn about the *fa'asamoa*, Apia was the wrong place to be as I would have to go to the rural areas to experience "*real fa'asamoa*". After having decided to move to Levao, I was often complimented on my choice by my Samoan acquaintances as the village was rumoured to have a "*strong fa'asamoa*" compared to other villages in the tsunami affected areas, possibly as these were more involved with the tourism industry.

3.3.1 Keeping with the past

Chapter 1.6 also noted that creating a sense of historic continuity with conceptions of the past is often central to constructions of tradition and national identity. Anthropologist Unasa Felise Va'a argues that attitudes to culture, history and traditions in Samoa is "unmistakeably one of cultural conservatism" (Va'a 2006:114), and that many steps are taken by both individuals and on government level to preserve what is considered traditional practises and governance of the past (ibid:113-115). It also appears a common attitude both among Samoan academics and in the expressions of my informants, that introduced changes such as Christianity and capitalism have been incorporated into the *fa'asamoa* with Samoans changing for example Christianity rather than being changed by it, and that despite obvious and important changes, the *fa'asamoa* is essentially unchangeable (Va'a 2006:114, Fuata'i 2007:182-183, Macpherson & Macpherson 2009:57). As a common saying goes: "*practices change but foundations remain*" (Fuata'i 2007:173), and my informants generally emphasised continuity when speaking about *fa'asamoa*. For example, one informant proudly told me that Samoa was the only country in the world which still had the same culture as in the beginning and that contrary to both the West and other Pacific Islands, the *fa'asamoa* would never change.

3.3.2 The importance of community

Keesing (1989) notes that among the cultural traits commonly emphasised in the process of cultural construction in the Pacific are communality, sharing and solidarity: "One manifestation of this process is the evocation of an ideology of sharing and communality to distance a "Melanesian way" or a "Pacific way" or "Fijian custom" from the individualism and fragmentation of Western capitalist society" (Keesing 1989:18).

Anthropologist Jeannette Mageo notes that sharing of goods and food within the extended family and communal solidarity between both relatives and villagers are often emphasised as defining elements of *fa'asamoa* (Mageo 1991:114). Ideals of sharing and family solidarity were also emphasised by my informants as "*the Samoan way*", contrasted with ideas about *palagi* ways. Kolone thus frequently contrasted values of communality and sharing with her conceptions of *fa'apalagi*, reminding me that I must consider myself lucky that I now had a Samoan family to rely on "*because I think in our country, you can't even go to eat something at your parents' house*", seemingly feeling genuinely sorry for me that I would have to go back to a country in which nuclear families and even individuals were on their own without the support of family and village. "*In Samoa you work for your family, while in the West you*

only work for yourself", another informant told me.

As noted in chapter 1.5, anthropological studies of disaster response have described strong feelings of community and solidarity arising in affected populations in the immediate disaster aftermath (Oliver-Smith 1999b, Hoffman 1999a, Jencson 2001). A similar sense of strong community solidarity was emphasised by my informants in narratives of the tsunami, articulated as typical traits of *fa'asamoa* rather than something arising from the disaster situation. Lani was thus recalling the days after the tsunami as a time of close community solidarity and socialising:

> "*And it was good that we get together, because we are used to being living together, sharing, laughing, crying together. And we were helping each other. (...) As I say we Samoans, in our culture we share things, we help each other. When there is sadness amongst the family we cry over it together, we laugh together. That's our culture and I really appreciate it!"*

Fa'alavelave was frequently mentioned by my informants when emphasising the communal nature of *fa'asamoa.* Studying Samoan diaspora in New Zealand, anthropologist Ilana Gershon argues that *fa'alavelave* is a display of family solidarity and love, with money and goods contributed and exchanged being heavily emotionally charged. Refraining from donating or not donating what is considered enough therefore becomes "a sign of not wanting to support one's family, of not wanting to be a part of the complex emotional connections of familial affection made visible through exchange" (Gershon 2006:155).

Despite expressions of hardships and discontent, *fa'alavelave* was also emphasised as an important and indispensable part of *fa'asamoa* by many of my informants and simply giving less or refraining from attending was not considered an option. In an interview conducted after attending a funeral *fa'alavelave* together, Lani told me that she was proud of the *fa'alavelave:*

> *"even though it makes people suffer. It makes people suffer to find something to give. And then it makes people suffer to find something to give back. But you know, I think it keeps people more together. Let's see, for example if I didn't want to give something to the fa'alavelave, it's like saying I don't want anything to do with that family any more*".

Though described as difficult and sometimes problematic, *fa'alavelave* was thus emphasised as an important element in maintaining family and village connections and solidarity.

Values communality were also tied up with conceptions of respect for authorities and the submission of the individual to social control. My informants frequently stated that Samoa was safer than other countries due to the power and legitimacy of the village *fono* and the respect for authorities which maintained harmony in the village. This image was contrasted with negative perceptions of western countries, which by many informants were considered highly unsafe. I often heard stories of people who had moved overseas and encountered crime, loneliness and lack of help from others. As I was preparing to leave Samoa, Kolone expressed serious concerns for my safety, especially in case something should go wrong at my flight transfer in Los Angeles: "*where I think the police would shoot you at the airport and you have no family to help you!*", she told me.

Conceptions of *fa'asamoa* were thus articulated as positive inversions of notions of Western culture and *fa'apalagi*. It should be noted that the representations of tradition and *fa'asamoa* accounted for here are almost exclusively articulated by members of mainline churches. As will be illustrated in chapter 4 and 7, members of new churches often expressed radically different attitudes to these ideals, especially the *fa'alavelave*.

3.4 The Christian Churches in Samoa

With an estimated 98 percent of all Samoans affiliated with a Christian Church, Christianity certainly dominates religious life (Samoan Bureau of Statistics 2008:14). Under the national crest is written "Fa'avae I le Atua Samoa"- "Samoa is founded on God" - which my informants referred to as the "*Samoan motto*". Christianity was first introduced to Samoa by missionaries from the evangelical Protestant London Missionary Society (LMS) in the 1830s. The Christian mission in Samoa is generally described as swift and successful, mainly due to a high degree of cooperation between missionaries and *matais*. Cluny and La'avasa Macpherson argue that the new religion legitimized rather than challenged the authority of *matais* and that the chiefly authorities supported rather than opposed the presence of missionaries in their respective villages (Macpherson & Macpherson 2009:33-34). The church founded by the LMS, later to be called the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa, or simply "the Congregational Church", was the first and still is the largest denomination in Samoa. The first Catholic missionaries arrived in 1845 and when the Methodist mission was arrived in 1857, all three so-called mainline Churches were established in Samoa (Ernst 2006:547-553).

3.4.1 Church and *fa'asamoa*: an inseparable partnership

According to Fepa'i Fiu Kolia and Maligi Evile, both pastors of the Congregational Church, the churches work closely together with *fa'asamoa* and Kolia argues that: "Christianity sits on the culture. It means that Christianity is safe in the cradle of culture" (Kolia 2006:146, Evile 2007:78). Samoan scholar Lafita'a Fuata'i also describes Christianity as being "more or less synonymous with Samoan culture", stating that the Christian faith is recognised and manifested in cultural ceremonies and *fono* activities as well as government and parliamentary meetings and celebrations (Fuata'i 2007:174).

Macpherson and Macpherson argue that the identity of a Samoan village is so intertwined with the Christian churches that it is almost inconceivable to think of one without the other, as if the church had always been the foundation of the village, not an imported ideology introduced less than 200 years ago (Macpherson & Macpherson 2009:106). Referred to as the *feagaiga*, the relationship between a village and its pastor is likened to the relationship between a brother and sister: a relationship of mutual respect and carefully balanced power (ibid:2009:107,134).

When asked to explain the relationship between the Christian churches and *fa'asamoa*, my informants from the mainline churches were remarkably concurrent, stating that "*the church and the culture goes together*" or "*they work together, the church and the culture"* and other similar statements. When asked to exemplify these statements, I was often presented with stories of village conflict and resolution in which pastors had acted as mediators in conflicts within the group of *matais*, thus upholding peace and order in the village when the *fono* failed to do so, in a relationship of mutual dependency and completion between pastors and *matais* (see also Shore 1982:20).

3.4.2 Christianity and the continued belief in spirits

Despite the strong position and presence of Christianity, pre-conversion belief in ancestral spirits continued to play a role in the lives of many of my informants, mainly related to their potentially harmful qualities in causing illness. Anthropologist and scholar of Christianity Joel Robbins argues that continued belief in a pre-conversion spirit world in Christian populations and individuals does not imply that the people in question are not truly Christians or that Christianity is only a thin layer covering underlying continuity with pre-conversion religion. Rather, pre-conversion beliefs are incorporated into a Christian cosmology of God and Satan

as opposite and struggling powers, in which for example ancestral spirits are referred to the domain of the latter and thus placed in opposition, but ultimately inferior to, the Christian God (Robbins 2007:6, 2009:112-119, Meyer 1992).

The most striking example of belief in harming capacities of ancestral spirits during my fieldwork was the story of Pone, a young woman of 17 who had become pregnant with her boyfriend. The boyfriend's father, who had disapproved strongly of the relationship and of Pone herself, died some months later and shortly after, Pone lost the baby and fell ill. This happened some months prior to my arrival to the village, but Pone still had frequent stomach pains, which no doctor had been able to explain or cure. The village rumour, as I heard it from several women and from Pone herself, was that the spirit of her boyfriend's father had killed the unborn child and was still causing the pain. During our conversations, Pone expressed ambiguity in her attitude towards what she referred to as *mai aitu* (spirit sickness), sometimes stating the she didn't believe any of it, but placed all her trust in God and sometimes expressing her fear that the spirit of her boyfriend's father would continue to make her ill. A similar ambiguity concerning the importance of spirits was expressed by other informants and though stories of spirits were sometimes told, they were often followed by exclamations like "*thanks God, we don't have to worry about that any more*", as the power of Christianity was considered superior.

A full discussion of the relationship between pre-conversion spirit beliefs and Christianity in Samoa is beyond the scope of this thesis, but my data indicates that belief in ancestral spirits continued to play a role, albeit within a Christian framework in which spirits were ultimately seen as a part of destructive or demonic forces which could be overcome by the Christian God.

3.4.3 Public display and pressure for church donations

Building and maintenance of impressive church buildings and main offices, administration costs, staff salaries and not least supporting the households of pastors are costly and the mainline Churches in Samoa are dependent on large economic funds, raised primarily through private donations from members of local congregations (Thornton et al. 2010:6-8). Some variations exists between both mainline Churches and congregations within the same denominations, but generally and also in Levao and Salesi, donations were given to maintenance and general expenses every other week and a direct contribution to the pastor

and his household every fortnight, referred to as *alofa* (love and compassion). Twice a year, a large collection for the main organisation of the Congregational and Catholic Churches took place in the villages. Though there were no official fixed amounts, my informants referred to amounts of more than 1000 tala as the money they "*would have to pay*".

Church donations and *alofa* were in most Congregational churches, including in both Salesi and Levao, given in nuclear families with a reading aloud of names and the size of family contributions during every Sunday service. This practice of public display and acknowledgement was also evident in other ceremonial contexts where gifts received or exchanged would be acknowledged loudly by one of the *matais* shouting out the amounts of money and other gifts for the entire village to hear. This is according to Thornton et al. (2010) originally a pre-Christian celebratory traditional practice of public recognition, taken up by the Congregational Church shortly after missionary times. Thornton et al. argues that with acculturation of Christianity and transition to a more Western cash economy, this practice, referred to as *folafola,* is increasing the pressure for donations, which have evolved into a competition among wealthy families within a village and between villages within the same congregation to have the largest churches and the most wealthy pastors (Thornton et al. 2010:9).

The pastors of the Congregational churches in both Levao and Salesi both insisted that *folafola* was not about pressuring anyone, but a traditional way of respectfully acknowledge those who had donated. Some core members of their congregations did, however, see it as a way of pressuring people to make larger donations. Moana, a teacher of the primary school in Salesi and member of the congregational church in the village thus explains the practice and its purposes:

> *"In our church, they can read because some others hide behind this one. They did not donate any things! That's why it's better to read for the one who have no donations. (...) And if you see that person who has only one tala, I think he has low self esteem at that time. He looks so low. So they can have a donation next time!"*

For many families in Levao and Salesi, financial obligations and expected contributions to the church posed significant challenges to household economies. In my host family, various church expenses often meant that essential need such as food, transportation and clothing were not met. Preparing a welcoming ceremony for a newly deployed deacon for the Catholic church in Salesi, each family was expected to donate 250 tala and 5 cases of boxed herring.

Church obligations had been high the previous weeks due to two other deacons visiting and Kolone expressed her regret that they had no money left for food: *"Sometimes we have to give to the church, so we have no money to feed the family. We just only have the taro and the coconut cream and the tea"*. I asked her if they might cut back on church donations during difficult economic times, an idea which she firmly dismissed:

> *"Oh, this would be very ashamed for us. If the deacons came and there were no presents for them, we would feel so very ashamed of this. So even if the family has no money, they have to find some money. So that's our Samoan culture. It's very hard!"*

Reducing church contributions was clearly not an option for Kolone, an opinion voiced by several of my informants of the mainline churches. According to Kolone, she felt she had to donate a minimum of 100 tala "*for the love of the pastor*" at the regular donations during Sunday service. "*And even if you do not have any money, you just have to find the money from somewhere*", she told me.

From conversations with Congregational pastors in Apia churches and in the central administration it seemed that some pastors of the Church had publicly been criticising the financial hardships that church donations often caused for ordinary families. A leading figure in the Congregational Church's central administration also expressed his discontent with the current financial arrangements to me, believing it to be problematic that often relatively poor families spent such high amounts on church donations. However, he felt that he could not publicly express such criticism now because of the prominent position he held in the Church leadership.

3.5 New Churches and recent processes of religious change

The last decades have seen a significant increase in the number of new Christian denominations in Samoa, mainly Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches originating in the USA (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2008:14, Ernst 2006:557). In the past 50 years, membership of the three mainline Churches has been gradually declining, most markedly in the Congregational Church. With 53.5 percent of the population being members of the church in 1961, membership had decreased to 33.8 percent in 2006. With the decline in membership of mainline Churches, a corresponding rise in membership has been evident in the Assembly of God and a number of other Pentecostal Churches, as well as the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (LDS) and Seventh Day Adventist Church, both established around 1890,

but both still referred to as "new churches"[8] by my informants. Approximately a third of the population was affiliated with one of these "new Churches" according to 2006 statistics (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2008:14, Ernst 2006:545). As documented by Ernst, other mainline Churches in the Pacific are experiencing a similar decline (Ernst 2006:700).

Though these new Churches in Samoa all trace their origins to Europe and North America, all have most contemporary members outside of what is considered Western countries, in Africa, Latin America, Asia and Oceania, and are growing expansively in the southern hemisphere. The recent growth of these Churches in Samoa is thus not a phenomenon unique to my field or the region of my study (Robbins 2004:117, Ernst 2006:687-692, Meyer 2010). In a study of religious change in the Pacific, Ernst argue that though global expansion of Christianity is not a new phenomenon, globalisation of Christianity has increased in the past decades with "the development of an increasingly complex network of transnational Pentecostal, charismatic and evangelical groups and churches, which together form a renewal movement in which flows of people, money, ideas and images spread with growing speed and intensity" (Ernst 2006:687).

3.5.1 Religious freedom and challenges to *fono* authority

The Samoan constitution officially ensures freedom of religion for all. However, at the village level, the *fono* decides what churches are allowed, which has caused conflicts between members of new churches wanting to establish in a village and the *fono* not permitting this (Human Rights Council 2011:15). A particular case in the village of Salamumu, which I also visited, illustrates a situation of conflict between new church members and village *fonos*. In this case, a family was banned from the village for conducting bible study sessions in a newly established evangelical church. Defying the *fono's* orders to leave the village, the houses belonging to the family were burned down and five members of the new church had their hands and feet tied forcefully together and carried out of the village like pigs on sticks, a traditional style of punishment also noted by the first missionaries in Samoa (Turner 2007:139). The case was later taken to the national court system, where 33 male members of the village were found guilty of arson and violent assault and sentenced accordingly. The constitutional right to religious freedom was underlined explicitly in the final verdict (So'o 2000:243, Supreme Court of Samoa 2000).

[8] My informants of both so-called new and mainline churches defined themselves using these terms. The term "new Churches" does thus not mean new in any strict temporal sense, but is an emic way of classifying Churches in two main categories.

When I visited the village, the family had returned and rebuild and had given up plans of establishing the church in the village. The power and authority of the *fono* was thus re-established and harmony seemingly restored. Though the national court system had ruled in favour of religious freedom over *fono* authority, no system was in place for enforcing such rulings and upon returning to the village, the family had to submit themselves to the authority of the *fono*.

In March 2010, a Commission of Inquiry on Religious Freedom was established by Parliament after advise and request from the National Council of Churches (NCC), consisting almost solely of mainline Churches, to look into possibilities of limiting the number of new Churches establishing in Samoa (Human Rights Council 2011:15). An official statement in the Samoan Observer announcing the appointment of the Commission reads:

> "...freedom of religion has somehow posed a direct challenge to the autonomy of the village council. With most of the cases brought before Court in the past, it ruled in favour of the freedom of religion, and with the authority of the indigenous Government found wanting" (Samoan Observer 16/03/2010).

In an interview with a leading representative from the NCC, I was first met with obvious suspicion, as he thought I was seeking to establish a branch of a Danish Church in Samoa, which I believe illustrates the suspicion with which mainline churches saw the influx of new Churches to the country.

At the time of my departure from Samoa, the official report from the Commission had been submitted to Parliament and has still not been made publicly available (Human Rights Council 2011:15). From private conversations with representatives from the Commission, however, I got the clear impression that there would be no changes in the legislation, as limiting the right to religious freedom would be politically problematic, first and foremost because Samoa was bound by international conventions to protect individual freedom rights.

In the following chapter, the establishment of new churches will be explored in more detail, turning from the national and global to the local level of post tsunami church establishment in Levao and Salesi.

Presenting fine mats for *fa'alavelave*.

Arriving for evening service in a newly erected church

4 Changing church life in Levao and Salesi

As noted in chapter 1, the religious organisation in Salesi had changed markedly after the tsunami, with the village now being open for all Christian denominations and with four new churches already established: the Seventh Day Adventists, the Assembly of God, the Holiness church and the Eden[9] church in addition to the Congregational and Catholic congregations already there. In Levao, only the Congregational church was allowed and these rules had not changed after the tsunami. However, this does not imply that religious life in Levao was untouched by processes of change. A number of families from Levao had also changed affiliation and joined the new churches, walking or being picked up by leading members or missionaries of the new churches to attend church service and activities in Salesi.

Though this thesis is not primarily concerned with official theology and doctrine, but with local manifestations and experiences, some general understanding of the origin and beliefs of the new churches are necessary in understanding their attitudes and responses to the tsunami, post tsunami religious change and to tradition and *fa'asamoa*, which will be explored in the following chapters. The first part of this chapter gives a short presentation of the new churches, their beliefs and origins as well as the size and characteristics of their congregations as they were manifested in the village during my fieldwork. In the latter half of the chapter, I make some suggestions as to how the changes in church life in the villages had come about in the tsunami aftermath.

4.1 New churches in Salesi

All four new churches in Salesi trace their origin to the Great Awakenings of 19th century North America, a time of evangelical Christian revivals lead by Protestant pastors and congregations. Eschatological doctrines of a rapidly approaching Second Coming of Christ and focus on individual acceptance of personal salvation in the Holy Spirit were important and defining elements of the revival movements in general (Coleman 2006:163, Ernst 2006:694, Robbins 2004:119-120, Kärkkäinen 2010:229-231).

[9] Some names of the smaller churches, e.g. the "Eden" and the "Holiness" churches have been changed to protect anonymity of informants, who would otherwise be too easily identified.

4.1.1 Adventism

The Seventh Day Adventist Church began as an apocalyptic-millenarian movement in 1840s USA during the Second Great Awakening and the Church continues to hold strong eschatological beliefs. A main characteristic of Adventist practice is the observance of Saturday as the Sabbath and a prohibition of a number of foods and beverages, most importantly in my empirical context the prohibition of eating pork as stated in the Old Testament. The Church also places great emphasis on proselytising (Keller 2006:275-276).

The Adventist church was in many ways the most well-established of the new churches in Salesi. Approximately 30 adults and a large number of children attended church services on Saturdays which were followed by lengthy Bible study "seminars". Some current members including Tavai, a high ranking *matai* in Salesi and a leading figure of the church locally, had been members of Adventist congregations before the tsunami, attending service in other villages. A carpenter by trade, Tavai had for some years tried to influence the *fono* by working for free on village projects, among other things building the primary school for free some years back. Tavai, who is also the man behind the quotation forming the title of this thesis, appears to have been very active in working to change village rules after the tsunami.

4.1.2 Holiness

Based on teachings of founder of Methodism John Wesley, the Holiness movement, from which the Holiness Church grew, focus on conceptions of Christian perfection, living a sanctified life free from sin. Central to the Holiness Church is a notion of "second blessings", actively choosing personal salvation through spiritual rebirth, and being empowered and sanctified by the Holy Spirit to live a so-called "Christ-like" life. Other core values and beliefs of the Church are strong emphasis on proselytising and on eschatological doctrines (Coleman 2006:162-163).

The Holiness church in Salesi had between 15 and 25 members attending church service on Sundays, all of them having joined the church after the tsunami. Two sisters and their families made up a large part of the regularly attending members, showing up to and participating enthusiastically in all activities. Church service and other activities were relaxed and informal in style with singing, laughing and dancing combined with engaging sermons. Though the presence of the Holiness Church in Samoa is relatively small, the church runs its own theological school with a five year studies programme. Students and volunteers from the

school frequently participated in the weekly Bible studies in Salesi and spent the day in the village as a part of an official mission programme.

4.1.3 Pentecostals

The Eden Church and Assembly of God are both charismatic Pentecostal Churches. Pentecostalism grew out of the Holiness movement and the two share many key traits, such as individual salvation through rebirth in the Holy Spirit, eschatology and a strong focus on evangelizing. Following the charismatic doctrine that the gifts of the Holy Spirit as seen in first century Christians after the day of Pentecost are available to modern-day believers, the Pentecostal movement places strong emphasis on manifesting salvation and the presence of the Holy Spirit through glossolalia, prophecy and divine healing (Robbins 2004:119-123, Anderson 2010:22).

With little more than 100 members in Samoa according to state statistics, the Eden Church was small even on a local scale, though Malo, the founder and leader of the Church in Samoa, claimed the membership count to be much higher. In the Eden church, glossolalia, healing and other gifts of the Holy Spirit were frequently emphasised and practised in Sunday services and Bible school. Church services were long and characterized by emotional outbursts, spontaneous glossolalia, loud singing and clapping as well as joint Bible readings. Though seemingly chaotic and unrestrained in form, the services were led by the pastor, who with expressions, music and tone of voice guided the congregation through the various elements of worship. Five nuclear families attended the Eden church in Salesi, which conducted Sunday services in the morning lead by my key informant Filia and her husband Lomi and drove to a newly erected main church in Malo's home in the village of Meapelo 20 kilometres away to conduct evening service and Bible studies, the latter consisting of a series of DVD presentations in English, translated into Samoan by Malo on the topics of how to receive and practice divine gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The Assembly of God (AOG) had after the change of village rules built a large concrete church in new Salesi, though the congregation was small with less than 20 individuals attending Sunday service. Once every month the congregation would meet with other AOG congregations in the neighbouring district with prominent pastors attending, loud music and expressive practice of gifts of the Holy Spirit, mostly healing and glossolalia. Due to time constraints and as the members of the AOG in Salesi did not appear very interested in talking

to me, I have only had more sporadic contact with this congregation.

4.2 Key doctrines: individual salvation and the Second Coming

Though these newly established churches were different in both doctrines and practices, individual salvation and eschatology were emphasised by them all. As will be argued in the following chapters, these two shared doctrines have influenced the way in which members of new churches interpreted the tsunami and acted upon it in post tsunami processes of change, and will therefore be accounted for in more details below.

4.2.1 Individual salvation

Strong emphasis on individual salvation was expressed in all new churches in Salesi, and I was often told that members of mainline churches were not true Christians as they had not accepted Jesus as their "*personal saviour*". Salvation and receiving gifts of the Holy Spirit were articulated as a responsibility and potential of each individual regardless of gender, status and other social characteristics. Being saved was often termed as "*having a personal relationship with Jesus*", described as a close relationship between two friends. As Malo put it, mainline churches were all about man trying - and failing - to reach God, while his church was God reaching down to man, creating a close and personalized relationship with the divine.

According to Joel Robbins, focus on individual salvation and the gifts of the Holy Spirit as something available to all regardless of position and social characteristics, promotes egalitarian ideals and practices (Robbins 2004:124). The new churches of Salesi also seemed markedly more egalitarian in practices and organisation than mainline churches. In the Congregational church, relative rank in the village governance was mirrored in congregational hierarchies. A female member of the Congregational church explains this relationship:

> "*The structure in the village is also used as the structure in the church (...) So he is a matai, he is a respected person in the village structure and also respected in the church structure, because he is a matai. I am not a matai, my husband is not a matai, so I'm out, I'm the lowest stage of the structure in the village and also the lower in the church.*"

In the new churches, this hierarchy was much less marked. Whereas the Congregational pastors in the villages were figures of great authority and distanced respect, the pastors of the new churches generally engaged with their congregations in a much more egalitarian and

informal way. Members of new churches often emphasised the close and informal relationship with the pastor as one of the things they appreciated most compared to the mainline churches.

The egalitarian style was also evident in a strong focus on youth groups and activities in all the new churches. In these activities, the young people were encouraged to voice their own opinions, share their experiences and perform with their peers, and activities were characterized by an atmosphere of equality and informality. Even pastors and *matais* would listen respectfully to both young men and women, markedly different from the heavily hierarchical structure of village life in which young and untitled men and women were expected to keep quiet and respectfully obey and serve their elders and superiors. Vasa, the pastor of the Holiness church in Salesi, felt it was an important mission of the church *"to encourage youth to feel important. Not just to God, but also in the community"*. It was also clear that the new churches attracted young people with a large proportion of members under the age of 25.

4.2.2 Eschatology

Eschatological doctrines in general invoke belief in a Second Coming of Christ followed by a final judgement in which Jesus will separate the saved from the unsaved, allowing the former to Heaven and sending the latter to Hell (Ryle 2001:240, Kärkkäinen 2010:229-231). Eschatological doctrines and beliefs had been defining elements in the Great Awakenings from which all new churches in Salesi trace their origins and it was clear from interviews and conversations with both pastors and ordinary members that all new churches in Salesi held explicit eschatological doctrines.

The rapidly approaching Second Coming of Christ was a frequent topic of both Bible studies and, surprising to me, casual conversations. Filia of the Eden church was eager for me to grasp the importance of this and often voiced her frustrations when I was reluctant to agree with her. Discussing the Book of Revelations, the final book of the Bible predicting the Second Coming of Christ, I said it seemed to me rather "surreal", which made Filia angry and she made me promise "*never ever to say anything like that again! It's so real! I don't ever want to hear you say that it's not real"*. At my departure, Filia and I expressed mutual wishes that I would be able to return to Samoa one day, when she added that it wasn't really of much significance, as she would most likely see me in Heaven sooner than I would be able to return any ways. As will be illustrated in chapter 5, interpretations of the tsunami as a sign that the

Second Coming was near was common amongst my informants of the new churches.

4.3 Criticising local economies

The financial arrangements of the mainline churches, the practice and pressure of the *folafola* and the relative wealth of many Congregational pastors were important topics for all the new churches in Salesi in defining themselves as necessary alternatives to the mainline churches. A common view amongst members of the new churches was that members of mainline churches were too preoccupied with material concerns, such as constructing and maintaining impressive church buildings and that they did not provide any real spiritual religiousness in church services and in the lives of the congregations. Filia thus described mainline churches as being all about "*competition and flashing donations*" when they ought to have been focusing on God.

Another expressed criticism was that mainline pastors were exploiting their congregations by pressuring poor members into financing their luxurious households. At one Congregational church service I attended in Levao, the sermon, which was done partly in English for the benefit of two New Zealanders visiting the pastor, was clearly about the duty of supporting those who did the work of God, e.g. the pastors, with material things, and perhaps influenced by the strong criticism of the greed of Congregational pastors voiced by my informants of the new churches, I could not help feeling a personal indignation at what to me sounded like a very obvious demand for more money. That the pastor of the Congregational church of Levao was a wealthy man compared to all other residents of the village was obvious: his houses, of which he had one both in the village and in Apia, were large and well equipped, his adult children were all enrolled in costly educations overseas, and he drove two new imported German cars, whereas the only other cars in the village were a few run down second hand cars from relatives in New Zealand, which only the few wealthiest families could afford to drive.

From my attendance in various Sunday services it was also clear that donations made in the Congregational church were significantly higher than in the new churches. In general, the new churches seemed to be financed to a much larger degree from overseas main organisations and missionary programmes and unlike the mainline churches, the financial burdens did not primarily fall on the congregations. According to Thornton et al., and to pastors of new churches in Salesi, the lower demands for donations were main reasons for the increasing popularity of the new Churches in Samoa (Thornton et al. 2010:7)

Another common economic critique among pastors and members of the new churches in Salesi was an opposition to expensive and elaborate *fa'alavelaves*, advocating that people should focus on essential family needs rather than trying to live up expectations for still more costly funerals, weddings and *saofa'i*. Vasa of the Holiness church had himself recently become engaged and was planning on a simple wedding with a small reception and no *fa'alavelave*, pronouncing that *"there will be no ie toga or other Samoan stuff"*. Vasa felt that it was his duty as a pastor to *"help people not to burden themselves, trying to do more to be recognised"*. The recent wedding of Malia, done in the full *fa'asamoa* and with an elaborate *fa'alavelave* ceremony with more than 500 people attending, was frequently mentioned by members of the new churches as an example of how the *fa'alavelave* had gotten out of hand and become too great a burden to the Samoan people.

Criticism of the greed of some pastors of the mainline churches, mostly of the Congregational church, was also voiced in the attitude towards *fa'alavelave*. When attending *fa'alavelaves*, pastors would receive large parts of the donations to show respect and some informants of the new churches claimed that mainline pastors had made a business out of attending *fa'alavelaves*, just showing up at funerals expecting major shares of both food and money without even being related to the deceased. A similar criticism of the practice of funeral *fa'alavelaves* and the greed of pastors is voiced by New Zealand based Samoan journalist Tapu Misa (Misa n.d.). Whether or not conscious exploitation of *fa'alavelave* is in fact taking place, I do not know, but the accusations by members of new churches illustrates the nature of the critique.

4.4 Allowing new churches in Salesi

Leading members of the new churches generally referred to the date of the tsunami when asked when their church was established in Salesi. However, the rules were only changed some months after and most new churches had been officially established after April 2010. By referring to the actual date of the tsunami, pastors and missionaries from the new churches seemed to describe the change of *fono* rules as something happening after the tsunami not only in temporal, but also in causal terms. Apart from attributing the changes explicitly to the tsunami, my informants, including *matais* of Salesi who had been actively involved in the decision making process, did not agree and many seemed unsure about reasons and motivations for allowing new churches, stating different, and often religious understandings,

such as "*God just put this idea into their heads*", as Tavai told me.

The decisions to change the rules happened prior to my arrival and I will not attempt to establish beyond doubt what exactly had taken place. As noted by anthropologist Robert Borofsky, describing a piece of the past as "it really was" would mean imposing an order on that past which it never had (Borofsky 2000:6). In the following, I suggest an interpretation of the process of changing *fono* rules, relating it to post tsunami aid and recovery assistance from the new churches.

4.4.1 Church aid and recovery assistance

All churches present in Levao and Salesi had provided assistance in some form after the tsunami, though actual figures were hard to come by from the main organisations of the churches as much had been donated rapidly and in kind. My informants in Levao and Salesi emphasised aid from both mainline and new churches, when asked from whom they received help after the tsunami, but some certainly had made a bigger and more lasting impression than others. According to both village inhabitants and national leaders of the Churches, the Catholic and Congregational Churches had mostly donated food, clothes and other basic necessities some days following the tsunami, while the financial contributions had been to restore church buildings and in the case of the Congregational church in Salesi to build a church hall in the new village with a grant of 80.000 tala. The AOG and Eden churches had both provided some in-kind assistance to the affected population in general and in addition to this, helped a few families in Salesi who were already members rebuild their homes after the relocation.

The Holiness and Adventist churches seemed to have had the largest and most costly aid and recovery programmes in Salesi. According to the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) administration in Apia, three very severely affected villages, Salesi being one of them, had been targeted with relief and recovery assistance. ADRA had amongst other things provided kitchen kits for all households and carried out a 6 month "cash for work" programme in which a number of village *taulele'a* were given 20 tala per day to work in reconstruction of the village and infrastructure to thereby support families financially and involve the community in practical recovery work.

The Holiness was the only church which still had an active and regular recovery programme in the village during my fieldwork. Every Tuesday, a truck arrived from the main office in Apia bringing with them volunteers from the theological school, who helped with various tasks relating to the rebuilding of houses and agriculture, such as construction, landscaping and transportation of people, goods and sand for concrete between the new and old Salesi. As only a small minority had had cars before and most of them had been destroyed in the tsunami, this service was much sought after and needed.

4.4.2 Changing the rules

While the power to allow and ban churches from a village rests with the village *fono,* individuals and church representatives can seek to influence the *fono* through the proper channels, by discussions, presenting gifts or showing oneself as a valuable servant of the common good of the village (*tautua*), as Tavai of the Adventist church had attempted to do before the tsunami. With a heavily hierarchical system of decision making, the final decision may depend upon a few highest ranking *matais*, which seemed to have been the case in allowing new churches in Salesi. Solomono, a *matai* from Salesi who had taken part in the discussions about allowing new churches emphasised that not all *matais* had agreed to change the rules: *"Even me, I don't agree about that one. We depend on the decision of the high chiefs of Salesi. We don't have a voice about that one, only from the chief and the old ones"*. From Solomone's descriptions of the decision making process, it seemed that the decision to allow new churches had been made by a few highest ranking *matais* and with many others disagreeing.

When a group of visitors arrive in a village, a so-called *ava* ceremony is conducted with the presence of *fono* and visitors in which ceremonial speeches are made and *ava*[10] drunk according to relative rank before gifts are exchanged between visitors and host village. *Ava* ceremonies were generally described by my informants as the proper and normal way of welcoming both visitors and new church representatives to a village. Solomone described the meetings taking place between *fono* and new churches after the tsunami as happening according to the normal procedures and as a manifestation of Samoan cultural practice, with the new churches bringing money, food and other presents: "*Yeah, they bring their donations. Money. A lot of food. And the Samoan culture was demonstrated on that one. Samoan*

[10] *Ava*, or kava, is a drink made from dried and grinded *ava* roots dissolved in water and used throughout the western Pacific. *Ava* produces mild euphoria and relaxation. In Samoa, *ava* is drunk at ceremonial occasions, like *fono* meetings or when greeting visitors.

culture!". Pastors and core members of the new churches also noted that *ava* ceremonies had been conducted and that it had all happened in the *fa'asamoa*, regarding both ceremony and donations of gifts to the *fono*.

It should be noted that significant amounts of money appear to have switched hands in the process of allowing new churches. In other welcoming *ava* ceremonies in which I participated, such as welcoming a new deacon for the Catholic church in Salesi, approximately 2000 tala was given to the *fono*, which seems a rather standard amount, as this was also the number operated with by the UNDP when I visited villages and took part in *ava* ceremonies with the ER team and government officials[11]. For all new churches, the amounts presented to the *fono* appear to have been significantly higher with leading members and pastors of the new churches as well as members of the *fono* in Salesi stating between 4000 and 14000 tala for each ceremony, the majority of the money given to the highest ranking *matais*. Some informants explicitly linked these amounts to the acceptance of new churches, as Moana, herself the wife of a high ranking *matai* in Salesi, described the process: *So much money they prepare. Thousands! (...) The new churches ah? They give it to the council and they accept this one"*.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis and of my empirical data to determine to what degree the donations to the *matais* during *ava* ceremonies and the aid and recovery assistance had influenced the *fono's* decision to allow new churches. Some informants of the mainline churches blamed *matais* of Salesi for having become greedy after the tsunami and for having taken "*bribes*" from the new churches to change the rules, pointing out that those who had made the decision had also received the majority of money and goods. Though economic reasoning and motivations may very well have played a part, the following chapters will illustrate how local interpretations of the tsunami have also contributed to the processes of religious change.

[11] As this amount was given in cash to individual *matais* to use as they pleased, it posed a potential problem to organisational guidelines, which was noted by especially expat staff. Referred to and budgeted as "cultural obligations", avoiding it was not considered possible and the ministerial partners flatly denied going to villages without cash to give out.

5 Interpreting the tsunami

As stated in the introductory chapter, I approach the study of the tsunami and subsequent processes of change through analysing how variously positioned individuals interpret the tsunami and act upon these interpretations. Clifford Geertz has described anthropology as an interpretive science "in search not of law but of meaning" (1973:5) and in this chapter I turn first briefly to anthropological theory on processes of interpretation and making sense.

5.1 Perspectives on interpretations and making sense

Anthropologist Ulf Hannerz argue that: ”*Homo Sapiens* is the creature who ’makes sense’. She literally produces sense through her experience, interpretation, contemplation, and imagination, and she cannot live in the world without it” (Hannerz 1992:3). Studying culture is according to Hannerz to study how humans make sense of the world through a continuous production of meaning, taking the form of ideas, experiences, myths and beliefs which are both internalities, as they exist and are rendered meaningful in individual human minds and cognition and external as they are manifested in socially meaningful forms (ibid:3-10).

According to anthropologist Michael Jackson, anthropology concerned with meaning focuses on how meaning is created and used rather than seeking to establish any objective and underlying truths:

> "Rather than examine the epistemological status of beliefs it is more important to explore their existential uses and consequences. Our emphasis has thus shifted from what beliefs "mean" intrinsically to what they are made to mean, and what they accomplish for those who invoke and use them." (Jackson 1996:6)

I follow Jackson's approach in taking people's interpretations and sense making seriously as they are articulated and acted upon in the post tsunami situation. My aim is thus to explore experience and its uses rather than discover underlying "truths" about the tsunami and religious change and as argued by anthropologist Fredrik Barth "... to discover the meanings, of the actors themselves, of their institutions and concepts - i.e., the interpretations by which they variously construct the world" (Barth 1993:97).

As accounted for in chapter 1, some anthropological studies of disasters focus on how people make sense of disasters using already existing symbols and myths, placing the disaster in a familiar symbolic framework, incorporating it into already existing cultural categories,

symbols and mythologies. A similar description of making sense of novelty from already existing categories and cosmologies is found in anthropology on creativity and innovation. Anthropologists Jonathan Friedman and John Liep both argue that creativity and innovation are created from already existing cultural forms and practices and must be integrated into the social and cultural system in order to make sense (Liep 2001:10, Friedman 2001:48). Liep argues that attribution of meaning must make sense to people in terms of local signification and he defines creativity as ”activity that produces something new through the recombination and transformation of existing cultural practices or forms” (Liep 2001:2) thereby stating that what is new takes its departure from already existing concepts, forms and practices.

A similar conclusion on the process of making sense is drawn by anthropologist Marshall Sahlins (1986) in his analysis of the reception and murder of Captain Cook in Hawaii. Sahlins argue that the arrival of the British was interpreted as the return of a mythical Hawaiian god, thus incorporating the arrival of Cook in indigenous mythologies. The argument by Sahlins is that people act upon events according to their cultural presuppositions and already existing categories of experience:

> "For the world is experienced as already segmented by relative principles of significance; and even if the experience proves contradictory to people's categorical presuppositions, still the process of redefinition is motivated in the logic of their cultural categories" (Sahlins 1986:70).

Incorporating new phenomena in already existing mythologies and cosmological frameworks does not, however, imply a functionalist or static analysis of restoring harmony and reproducing cosmologies and values. Rather, as categories are applied in practice and to new conditions, they are functionally redefined. In the case of Hawaii, the pragmatics of trade with the Europeans was breaking apart traditional relationships of taboo between men, women, chiefs and commoners, as chiefs were imposing taboos to control trade and female commoners were breaking taboo by eating with their European sailor "husbands". Sahlins argue that by sharpening the distinctions between chiefs and commoners by monopolizing trade while weakening the distinction between men and women, the logic of taboo was negated and transformed: "Hence it is not simply that values of given relationships - as between man and women, chiefs and common people - were revised. The relationship between such relationships was revised. Structure was revised" (ibid:53). Values, traditions and cosmologies are thus transformed as they are reproduced and reproduction and transformation should not be seen a opposites or mutually exclusive processes (ibid:67-68).

Based on these perspectives, I define making sense as an active, interpretative process of understanding the tsunami within a framework considered meaningful by my informants. Meaning is considered not an entity to be discovered, either by me or by informants, but a continuous intersubjective and creative process of making sense (Gammeltoft 2003:283, Jackson 1996:26-29). Speaking about the tsunami is therefore not a passive reflection of events of structures of meaning, but itself an activity in which meaning is created (Hastrup 2003:215). What I study are continuous and often ambivalent processes of sense-making, rather than any one coherent system of meaning into which the tsunami is placed. Indeed, interpretations of the tsunami often appeared incoherent and disorderly, which I will discuss towards the end of this chapter.

5.2 "*This is Samoa - it doesn't happen here*": making sense of the unexpected

Anthropologist Peter Rudiac-Gould (in press) argues that in order for natural disasters to be subject to active sense making and explicit interpretations, they must be experienced as something outside of normal variations. In a study of climate change awareness and disasters in the Marshall Islands, Rudiac-Gould describes how a severe flood failed to result in increased awareness about rising sea levels among the affected population because the flood, though causing severe damage, was perceived as a variation of normal cyclical weather variations as it occurred in the expected season, and therefore not an event requiring explanation or action. Rudiac-Gould argues that in order for a natural disaster to possibly change behaviour, the disaster must be conceived as something new:

> "If a new threat is to be perceived and confronted as such - if it is to convince people to discard their usual assumptions of what can happen and to change their behaviour accordingly - it must do more than simply cause harm: it must be perceptibly different in size or kind from that which preceded it" (ibid)

Subsequently, the flood victims in Rudiac-Gould's empirical data offered no theories as to why the flood had happened and behavioural changes were not observed. In the following, I explore how the Samoan tsunami was experienced as something unprecedented and therefore, following the argument of Rudiac-Gould, requiring interpretation in the affected population.

Though rare, tsunamis are not new to Samoa. Through an extensive historical research of tsunamis in Samoa, George Pararas-Carayannis, director of the UNESCO[12] International Tsunami Information Centre, notes that though recordings in the area are both fragmentary

[12] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

and incomplete, a large number of tsunamis have been documented. Despite high levels of earthquake activity in the ocean areas placing Samoa at risk of tsunamis, most recorded tsunami were minor ones as the force of the waves were mitigated by the protection of off-shore reefs which surround the islands (Watson 2007:23, Pararas-Carayannis 1980:4-6). There are, however, written records of three large tsunamis causing significant destruction, the two largest occurring in 1868 and 1917, both on the south coast of Upolu, the latter with reported waves of up to 40 feet. According to Pararas-Carayannis the most recent tsunami in Samoa happened in 1960 with waves up to 15 feet, also affecting the eastern and southern parts of Upolu, including the villages where I have done my study (Pararas-Carayannis 1980:5-41).

None of my informants seemed to be aware of or remember any tsunamis happening before. On the contrary, many were confident that no tsunamis had ever hit Samoa as Moana exclaimed: "*Never! This is the first time. First time for tsunami in Samoa*". Another informant of Salesi responded in a similar way: "*Oh no. This is Samoa! It doesn't happen here*!", thus seeing the tsunami as something surprising and unexpected, even unthinkable. Most informants seemed well aware that tsunamis happened regularly in other parts of the world, stating that though tsunamis happened elsewhere they had been sure that Samoa was safe. As a commentary on the tsunami in the Samoan Observer states: "Despite Samoa's vulnerable geographic location, I never thought it would be hit by such natural disaster. I really did believe God would always look after it" (Samoan Observer 04/10/2009:30). Such commentary illustrates how knowledge of geographical vulnerability and potential hazards of natural disasters did not necessarily preclude a religious understanding of Samoa as being safe from tsunamis.

A common statement in narratives of the tsunami among my informants was that people had returned to their regular duties after the earthquake. Some reported having gotten tsunami warnings by text message, which they had not taken seriously. As a female inhabitant of Salesi recalls the minutes after the earthquake:

> "*We didn't think anything will happen after the earthquake. But the earthquake is too strong! It takes a long time to shake the earth. But after the earthquake (...) we still prepare for school without preparing for the tsunami. We didn't think anything would happen."*

Other tsunami victims of the two villages told similar stories of the minutes following the tsunami, taking showers and preparing children for school and only escaping to higher

grounds when actually seeing the first wave approaching. Anthropologist Susann Ullberg argues that in studying vulnerability, we must examine how communities remember and forget and that when previous disasters are not remembered collectively, a process heavily influenced by power and authority, vulnerabilities are reproduced or enhanced, which might also have been the case in the tsunami affected area of my study (Ullberg 2010:12,15).

5.3 Making sense of the tsunami

Following the argument of Rudiac-Gould, the tsunami being perceived as something unprecedented and unexpected would provoke explanations and interpretations in the affected populations trying to make sense of the tsunami, and my informants also seemed preoccupied with making sense of both the tsunami and its consequences. The remainder of this chapter will explore these interpretations as they have been presented to me by my informants in the villages of Levao and Salesi, illustrating how the tsunami is understood mainly within Christian cosmologies of divine punishments, agency and eschatological beliefs.

5.3.1 The tsunami as divine punishment

Interpretations of the tsunami as a punishment from God were expressed by many of my informants and had also been a key theme in media debates in the tsunami aftermath (Samoan Observer 02/10/2009:12, 04/10/2009:2, 05/10/2009:3). Some of my informants were explicitly biblical when referring to the tsunami as a punishment, comparing it to the biblical Flood in the Book of Genesis and stating that both had been sent by God to wash away sin and those who committed it.

The most common view among those who expressed a belief in the tsunami as a divine punishment was that God had sent the tsunami to punish those who did not keep the Sabbath holy at the beach *fale* accommodations along the coast in the area hit by the tsunami. The south east coast which was the most severely damaged area was before the tsunami one of Samoa's main tourist destinations and many of my informants pointed out to me that this correlation was not coincidental, stating that the tsunami had been a punishment from God, because owners of the beach *fales* arranged or allowed for activities such as music, games, swimming and barbecues on Sundays. Thus Moana of the Congregational church explained the tsunami as being a punishment for people not keeping the Sabbath holy:

> "*Only the tourist places, they were all washed away. With people! That's a punishment for them. Other families from Apia, they come over here on Sunday and*

> *have an entertainment, a barbecue, a band making lots of noises without singing a hymn from God. But they are Samoans! They know God, they know Sunday, this is the one day for them to go to church, but they take Sundays to entertain themselves over here. That's why I say, it's a punishment for those people*".

In a similar way, Fatu, who was a young educated man from Salesi with a prestigious job in the public administration in town, voiced a clear view of the tsunami as a punishment and message for the people engaged with tourism for not properly observing the Sabbath:

> "*The tsunami gives all people a lesson in terms of rethinking. To rethink that whatever we are doing in life, that's my own lesson, whatever we have in life, we're rich or whatever, be sure we prioritise God. Cos I believe, the tsunami hit all the tourist development out here. So that's why it is a lesson for them, ei? On Sunday they must keep to God, not for this".*

Fatu told me this very sombrely, but in other contexts he would refer to the tsunami as a punishment in a more joking manner, stating that it must have come to wipe away one of our mutual acquaintances, who had been "*very naughty*", thus also manifesting a view of the tsunami as punishment in humorous remarks.

5.3.2 The importance of Sundays

In my host family, as in most families in Levao and Salesi, a strict code of behaviour was observed on Sundays from sunrise till sunset. All food was cooked and the tidying up done very early in the morning before the morning service and the rest of the day used for church activities, *toanai* (Sunday lunch), praying and quiet relaxation. My experience of village life on Sundays was thus in accordance with what ethnographer F.J.H. Grattan noted more than 60 years earlier: "Samoans are punctilious in their recognition of the Sabbath and all unnecessary activities are suspended. The day is devoted to church observances" (Grattan 1948:138).

Recognising the Sabbath was often emphasised by my informants as a key element of fa'asamoa, not just as a biblical but also as a traditional rule. Lani, who had repeatedly described herself as "*a very traditional person*", was passionate about traditional village life and saw following the strict codes of behaviour on Sundays as a key part of keeping traditions alive: "*That's how I look at it: the village life should be revived and should signify the Sunday and making sure to stay with the past. You know, like keeping Sunday as a holy day, and as a sacred day."* To Lani, the importance of strict observance of the Sabbath was far reaching, not only as traditional practice and rule, but as an important means of keeping youth from getting

into trouble and upholding one of the cornerstones of the *fa'asamoa*, respect (*fa'aaloalo*):

> *"So we must say that Sunday is a holy day, we need to do this to our children, bring them here. It's also a way of controlling them and keeping them from being violent. And if we are not careful with that, we old people, they won't live into that kind of culture, but if we keep saying this one, they too will grow up with the respect and the understanding that this is traditional! To respect! And that will control their children too from going astray".*

Though keeping the Sabbath holy certainly was a biblical and religious rule, when asked to explain the importance of it, people often responded along the lines of "*it's in the fa'asamoa*" or simply that it was so according to village rules which must be obeyed. Explaining to me why Sundays were so important Tao stated that "*Because here our culture is very strong",* thus equating the recognition of Sundays with the strength of culture. A similar tendency is noted by anthropologist Jacqueline Ryle in her analysis of Christianity in Fiji (2001, 2004), stating that the importance of the Christian Sabbath was emphasised as an intrinsic element of "true" fijianness and exploited in nationalist rhetoric and political action in conflicts between Indo-Fijian and indigenous Fijian population (Ryle 2001:211).

Those of my informants who expressed a view of the tsunami as divine punishment for not properly recognizing the Sabbath also seemed eager to emphasise that it was not a problem of inappropriate behaviour in itself, but the fact that it was Samoans who were engaging in it as Samoans ought to know better and not try and act like *palagi* tourists. An elderly woman from Salesi thus expressed the connection between disasters and Samoans imitating *palagi* ways rather than honouring being Samoans and being Christians:

> "*And the only thing, they know well God. And the only one day of God. And Samoa is a Christian country! But they kept the Sunday as an entertainment of themselves. I'm very sorry of Samoan people. They like to be a palagi (...) That's no good! I think Samoans can think hardly about their motto. God is our saviour, our leadership. Our leader for everywhere. Our guide. And they guide themselves by evil things.*

In a similar way, referring to the newly rebuilt beach *fales* at a neighbouring village, Moana complimented the work they had been doing to rebuild after the tsunami: *"And I think they've build new houses. It's nice! It's good for palagi. But Samoan, it's not good for Samoans"*. Fatu also deplored those who were trying to act like *palagis*: *"Because not only are they not going to church, but you know, the people out there they are more or less like the palagi and they try to make like the palagi do".* The problem as it appears to these informants is thus that

Samoans try and act like *palagis* instead of behaving like Samoans should, namely follow village rules and remember their Christian foundations.

The view that the tsunami was a divine punishment was mainly expressed by my informants of mainline churches. Amongst my informants from the new churches in Salesi, explicit expressions of divine punishments were only rarely articulated. Instead, the tsunami was generally referred to as a warning and as a sign of the Second Coming, which the following chapter will explore.

5.3.3 Eschatology in local interpretations of the tsunami

As accounted for in chapter 4, all new churches in Salesi held eschatological doctrines. Though tsunamis are not explicitly mentioned in the Book of Revelations and the Gospel of Mark chapter 24, the two most cited biblical passages predicting the Second Coming and the signs occurring prior to this, earthquakes are, and the majority of my main informants of the new churches referred to these biblical passages as evidence that the tsunami should be interpreted as a sign of the Second Coming. As Vasa of the Holiness Church, pointed out to me, only those who had not read the Bible could be surprised by the tsunami, as everything had already been predicted. Interpretations of the tsunami as foreboding the Second Coming were by many members of the new churches articulated as a matter of fact and therefore not up for discussion - something that everyone who had read the Bible would know - and it was commonly brought up by my informants in both interviews and regular conversations. Like the Hawaiians of Sahlins' analysis, the tsunami was interpreted as a fulfilment of an anticipated divine return and thus incorporated into a familiar cosmology and mythology. Some informants of the new churches seemed genuinely excited by the idea of this world coming to an end, the tsunami being a promise of great times and justice to come, but also a warning for those who had not already been saved, which I experienced first hand with Aipo, a local missionary of the Holiness Church who spent every Tuesday in Salesi, preaching especially to the youth of the village.

Walking home from Salesi one evening, I hitched a ride on an open truck bed with a group of members of the Holiness church driving people home after their weekly Bible study session. After dropping off the last people, I was alone on the truck bed with Aipo. I had taken the opportunity of conducting a short improvised interview with Aipo, who was telling me about his purpose in Salesi and about growing problems with youth drinking and violence in the

village, while I was scribbling in my notebook. Suddenly, a loud noise further along the road made me look to the cliffs which towered steeply along the stretch of road in old Salesi, and I saw rocks tumbling down taking others with it, creating a rock slide just a few meters ahead of the still moving truck. At first, I was confident that the rocks would hit us at the open truck bed, but I was relieved to see them fall noisily to the ground by the side of the road and we drove slowly through the cloud of dust it created.

Shaken by the rock slide I confided my fears to Aipo, who throughout the noise had been sitting undisturbed with a big smile on his face, appearing more excited than anything else by what for me was almost a near death experience. "*There's nothing to worry about*", he assured me with a big smile, "*this is God's time. We should rejoice and be happy that His time is near!*". He told me that the rock slide was God's kind way of warning me to turn to him and prepare for the Day of Judgement before it was too late, and went on to compare this experience with the earthquake causing the tsunami: "*you know, when the earthquake happened I was standing at Ulufao* [village on the outskirts of Apia] *and I saw everything shaking, it was so powerful and I raised my hands and yelled "praise God! The Lord is coming and I'm ready to be united!*". Aipo explicitly believed the tsunami to be the sign of this: "*The tsunami is how we know that God is near. The tsunami is already in the Bible. All the signs. Earthquakes, poor people, you see at the overseas television people shooting each other, families fighting each other. This is all God saying: be prepared*". And he continued that if one is truly prepared, one would rejoice at disasters and not be scared of them. "I guess, I'm not prepared then", I said half jokingly, and he told me again, rather seriously this time, that "*you better prepare, cos this is God's time*".

I met Aipo again in Salesi the following week, this time as a participant at the church's Bible study group. He told me that our experience last week had inspired him to share it with the pastors' college in town as a proof of God's infinite love and that they had all prayed for me together. He asked me if my heart was pure, but I hesitated and did not know how to answer. "*I think you have a pure heart*" he said, "*God warns his people*".

Aipo's response to the rock slide is one example of interpreting a natural phenomenon within a Christian and eschatological cosmology. Also, Aipo was passionate about his missionary work, which included me, and I clearly felt that he was using our experience with the rock slide as argument and means to convert me through frequent comments for the rest of our

acquaintance to the fact that I had received a warning from God and should consider myself lucky and respond gratefully by accepting Jesus as my personal saviour. The experience thus gave me first hand insight into proselytising methods of the missionaries in Salesi, openly using natural phenomena as argument by referring to the disaster as a sign of the Second Coming and as a warning from God to be saved before it was too late, which I will return to in chapter 6. By telling me that God had only warned and not harmed me in the rock slide because he saw that my heart was pure, Aipo also explicitly linked resilience in disasters to divine agency and reward for being a good and pious individual. I now turn to the topic of local views of resilience through divine interference.

5.4 Making sense of tsunami impact - divine protection and resilience

The opening quotation in chapter 1 illustrates how Filia explicitly connected her strong faith to being saved from the tsunami, stating that "*God saved us because he knows his own people*". In a similar way, she told me that her car was the only car in the village which was not destroyed by the tsunami, also because God knew that her main use of the car was driving to church, unlike the other cars which were used for "*bad things, like drinking beer*". Filia thus interpreted the impact of the tsunami and the relatively small damages it caused her family as a confirmation of her religious faith and practice being right and also in some ways superior to others.

Experiences of having been saved from the tsunami by some kind of divine intervention were shared by many informants across religious affiliations. On the morning of the tsunami, Kolone was walking along the beach on her way to Salesi just before the earthquake happened, but she turned around halfway without knowing exactly why, believing it to be divine intervention:

> "*I know that Jesus saved me from the tsunami. Because I was walking over there, I was going to the school. But I turned around at, you know, the place of the river. I don't know why - it was like God planted this thought in my head. And if I hadn't gone back, I would be dead now*".

Kolone also believed that her house, which was relatively undamaged by the tsunami considering its vulnerable position at the waterfront, had been protected by God, reminding me at the same time that her family was the only Catholic family in the village. "*And that's something to think about*", she told me with a knowing air, pointing to a shrine with crucifixes, rosaries and some family memorabilia with religious inscriptions in the corner,

which had been "*untouched by the wave"* though everything else inside the house had been washed away.

I also encountered explanations ascribing the very occurrence of the earthquake before the tsunami as divine protection: "*I thank God that he sent the earthquake before the tsunami. That's God's way of protecting his people, giving us time to run*", Pone told me. Apparently, Pone did not connect the tsunami to the earthquake in a geological sense of cause and effect, but rather as two separate phenomena linked only though divine intervention.

Filia also expanded the connection of divine protection to all of Samoa, claiming that the earthquake causing the East Asian tsunami of 2004 had been much smaller than the one causing the Samoan tsunami, but that the damages caused by the latter had been relatively small compared to the magnitude of the earthquake:

> "*And that's because God loves us. You know, I'm not judging those people, I'm just saying. It's something to think about. The earthquake here was so strong, many more people should be dead from that. But Samoa is a very Christian country. God knows us*".

So far, the empirical data presented in this chapter has illustrated how the tsunami was interpreted using religious doctrines and cosmologies and only very few of my informants did not articulate any religious understandings. It is, however, important to emphasise that the strong presence of religious interpretations did not cause an absence of non-religious understandings. A number of my informants also expressed more standard natural scientific explanations of the tsunami, appearing to be complimentary and coexist with religious ones rather than being mutually exclusive. The following section will explore the relationship between religious and non-religious interpretations as well as make some remarks on the diversity of Christian interpretations.

5.5 Dogma and confusion in interpreting the tsunami

When attempting, as I have, to give an insight into how members of an affected population perceive a disaster, somehow categorizing the complexities and multivocality of views from different individuals without overly reducing the diversity of lived experiences, is a challenge. I do not wish to imply that all individually expressed views fall neatly within the categories of interpretations of the tsunami which I have identified and illustrated in this chapter. On the contrary, I encountered seemingly contradictory statements regarding for example the

question of the tsunami as punishment, with some informants clearly stating their opposition to such beliefs, but later in the same conversation contradicting their initial statements. Such seemingly contradictory statements were not unusual, and often it seemed that the closer I got to my informants, the more complex and contradictory their views of the tsunami appeared.

5.5.1 Science and religion in tsunami understandings

A number of my informants also articulated more standard natural scientific interpretations of the tsunami as resulting from movements of tectonic plates, expressed alongside religious views with no clear line between the two. Initially, this concoction of religious and scientific explanations, seemly mixed in a number of rather inconsistent ways, was a frequent cause of frustration and puzzlement to me.

Bradd Shore (1982) argues that concepts of personhood as containing an integrated and coherent personality with convictions existing independently from contexts are Western ethnocentric constructions which do not apply well to Samoan notions of the person. Rather, personhood in Samoan understandings consists of a series of roles, beliefs and convictions which change according to which role the individual is speaking from. With an example of a young man apparently expressing both support and opposition to a member of Parliament, Shore concludes that the young man is simply speaking from different roles, one as a member of the politician in question's family, the other as a member of another and competing branch of the extended family. What to a Western anthropologist might appear as a "thorny conflict of loyalties in these relations, the young man simply localized his judgements to different kinship contexts" (Shore 1982:139), puzzling, perhaps, to the ethnographer, but not experienced so by the young man himself.

As noted previously, Filia was among those of my informants who clearly and explicitly interpreted the tsunami in a Christian eschatological framework and its impact as a result of divine protection. Being a teacher of geography at the local secondary school, Filia was clearly well informed on the science of natural disasters and seemed deeply concerned with environmental matters, often eager to discuss pollution, climate change and rising sea levels as well as the science of earthquakes and tsunamis. One day Filia told me of an article she had read on movements of tectonic plates increasing in the future, changing patterns of seismic activity and making more people at risk of earthquakes. To Filia, the science of earthquakes, global warming and pollution were all developments corresponding to the signs of the Second

Coming in the Bible: "*We already see the signs. The earthquakes - so many now! Wars, families fighting, discriminations. We know that this is the Second Coming!"* Like the statements of Aipo following the rock slide, Filia argued that a growing occurrence of natural disasters in the world as well as armed conflicts and famines were all signs with biblical validation predicting the Second Coming. Her non-religious and scientific understandings of disasters, the natural environment and global political developments did therefore not take anything away from her religious interpretations and beliefs; rather it gave her beliefs in the Second Coming legitimacy from both the science of geography, news broadcasting and from the Bible.

Cecilie Rubow argues that rather than assuming an a priory problematic and mutually exclusive relationship between religious and scientific views, these often co-exist peacefully in a non competitive relationship at different levels of social reality. Thus the theory of 'big bang' might explain how the world came into being, while Christian myths of creation might explain why, without any necessary contradiction or conflict (Rubow 2009:102). In my empirical data, religious interpretations of the tsunami existed alongside scientific ones within communities and even within individuals as several possible and not mutually exclusive explanations. Thus, geological explanations of the tsunami did not exclude religious understanding and vice versa, and often the different views appeared to coexist peacefully within the same individual. Going beyond not being mutually exclusive, members of new churches actively used a combination of religious and secular scientific explanations in interpreting the tsunami as a sign of the Second Coming.

The fact that the combination and intertwining of religious and scientific explanations frustrated me was, I believe, a result of my own preconceived understandings of a dualistic relationship between religious and natural scientific understandings of the natural environment, and a preconception of religious understanding as being in opposition to scientific ones. The co-existence of various religious and scientific interpretations did not appear problematic to my informants who alternated between religious and scientific explanations, actively combining them en making sense of the tsunami. In the argument of Bradd Shore, my informants might be speaking from different roles, in Filia's case as both a teacher of geography and as a member of a church with eschatological doctrines.

Though the religious interpretations of the tsunami seemed to follow lines of church affiliation with some minor variations, this does not imply that people were passively mirroring interpretations defined by religious authorities. On the contrary, no pastors of the three mainline congregations in the villages articulated views of the tsunami as a punishment, but generally expressed opposition to such interpretations. A leading figure in main organisation of the Congregational Church also told me that he regretted not having issued an official statement urging people not to view the tsunami in terms of punishment and blame.

The views expressed by pastors and leaders of the mainline churches were mostly of a natural scientific nature combined with articulations of God's providential care, protection and assistance in the recovery phase. Though pastors were highly respected figures of authority, religious understandings of the tsunami did thus not appear to be defined by religious authorities and merely repeated by members of their congregations. In the new churches, most pastors and leaders expressed beliefs in the tsunami as a sign of the Second coming. It thus seems that interpretations by members of new churches were more in accordance with the views expressed by their pastors, perhaps unexpected with the higher degree of egalitarian and individualistic forms and doctrines in new compared to mainline churches, but possibly explainable with the very literary interpretations of the Bible expressed and encouraged in new churches, leaving less room for alternative interpretations.

The dominance of interpretations of the tsunami within Christian cosmological frames does not mean that any one Christian interpretation of the tsunami can be concluded. Within Christian doctrines and beliefs many different ways of making sense was expressed, thus illustrating the complex and diverse nature of Christianities among my informants, based partly on church affiliation, but also with different interpretations expressed by the same individuals. The statements of religious beliefs accounted for in this chapter should therefore not be turned analytically into one coherent and dogmatic belief system, thus reducing individual statements of belief into *the* belief of a people or a community. Rather, the diversity of interpretations within Christian cosmologies has proven an important insight as informants responded to these different interpretations and used them actively in bringing about or being in opposition to religious change, which will be explored further in the following chapter.

6 Post tsunami religious change - from interpretations to actions

As noted in the introductory chapter, the analytical approach taken to disasters in this thesis is one of process and agency. What this entails is an approach to disasters as historically embedded processes which will not stop developing after impact as culture never stops developing (Anderskov 2004:94). The analysis by Rudiac-Gould (in press) illustrates how people do not respond to disasters, but based on their perceptions of them. Perceptions of disasters are therefore a topic of interest in understanding local responses and actions in a disaster aftermath. In this chapter, I explore how differently positioned agents act upon and make use of religious interpretations in negotiations of post tsunami religious change. Similar to the position of anthropologist Christina Anderskov (Anderskov 2004:92), the aim of my study is thus to explore not only what a disaster does to people, but also what people do with disasters.

6.1 Perspectives on religious interpretations and social change

As noted by anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup (2004), it is a key understanding in social anthropology that perceptions and ideas of the world are the basis of social action by active subjects. The span between perceptions and actions allow for a possibility of creating new meanings in a continuously creative process of both continuity and change. Individuals are not passive victims of history or events, nor are individual actions merely reflections of a social order or means to maintain social structures, as was a central understanding in structural functionalist anthropology. Rather, Hastrup argues, modern anthropology is increasingly focusing on how active subjects creatively interpret the world and act upon these interpretations (Hastrup 2004:199-207).

As noted in chapter 5.1, interpreting an event from already existing categories and cosmologies does not necessarily imply reproduction and continuity. In this chapter, I explore how variously positioned individuals actively use interpretations of the tsunami in negotiations of religious change. I thus analyse the relationship between the local, in my empirical data mainly religious, interpretations of the tsunami and post tsunami processes of social change.

The importance of local perceptions of disaster in order to understand (and manage) disaster response has been widely recognised in anthropological approaches to disaster research (see for example Oliver-Smith 1999b, Hofmann 2002, Jencson 2001). However, as noted by Cecilie Rubow, the significance of religious understandings are largely absent in this work and only few anthropologists have explored religious understandings of disasters more than in passing (Rubow 2009:94-95).

Some studies do, however, document the presence and underline the importance of religious understandings of disaster. In a historic review of volcanic eruptions across continents, religions and time, geographer David Chester and geologist Angus Duncan (Chester & Duncan 2007) argue that religious interpretations of seismic activity form an important part of people's response to geological disasters. Citing a large number of both historical and more recent records of volcanic eruptions, Chester and Duncan argue that earthquakes are frequently perceived within religious cosmologies of divine power, sin and punishment, concluding that "although reactions vary between societies because of the differing theodicies of the particular faith community, there are relatively few eruptions where no religious element in human responses are recorded" (ibid:214). According to Chester and Duncan, Christian interpretations of disasters are centred around one of the core questions in Christian theology: reconciling a belief in a good and omnipotent God with the reality of human suffering (ibid:203).

Chester and Duncan further argues that religious views have largely been overlooked by social sciences as well as humanitarian organisations and therefore call for more focus on and respect for religious interpretations of disasters and human suffering (ibid:216). This call is also made by cultural geographer Henrik Svensen who in a history of natural disasters argues that religious reactions to natural disasters are often reduced to sporadic statements in newspapers, rarely studied in depth by those studying disasters:

> "Religious attitudes are seldom taken seriously by disaster researchers. This despite the fact that the religious dimension can be pivotal for an understanding of how disasters - the tsunami disaster, for example - affects us afterwards" (Svensen 2009:167).

Reviewing anthropological disaster literature, I have also found that studies of religious understandings of disasters are largely absent from anthropological literature on disaster response. The analysis of religious understandings in disaster response and post disaster

changes in this thesis is therefore largely of an exploratory nature and I do not presume to "connect just about everything to everything else and get, thereby, to the bottom of things" as Clifford Geertz describes anthropological ambition (Geertz 2000:ix). Rather, I suggest some possible implications of religious understandings in post tsunami response, analysing how my informants act upon religious interpretations of the tsunami in bringing about or opposing social, in my empirical data in the form of religious, change.

6.2 Reducing vulnerability and the problem of religious perceptions

As mentioned in chapter 1, concepts of risk and vulnerability reduction in disaster recovery and as preventive measures in so-called disaster prone geographical areas and populations form a key part of discourse and policy in humanitarian NGOs and in UN organisations, including the Samoan UNDP office and the ER team.

According to anthropologist Cecilie Rubow (2009), only a few studies of disasters explore the relationship between building resilience and religious interpretations of hazards and disasters, and the studies which do tend to view religious interpretations one-sidedly as problematic and out-dated compared to scientific models of causality. Critically examining studies of post disaster behaviour and trauma in the Cook Islands and adaptation to rising sea levels through migration in Tuvalu, Rubow illustrates how studies of post disaster response tend to view religious interpretations as problematic hindrances to successful adaptation, vulnerability reduction and psychological resilience (Rubow 2009:99). Encountering local interpretations of cyclones as a form of divine punishment and intervention in the Cook Islands, disaster psychologist A.J. Taylor deems this response "inappropriate and anachronistic", and is puzzled at the existence of religious interpretations "when a tenable and well-attested scientific alternative explanation is available" (Taylor in Rubow 2009:100). In Taylor's view, a belief in the punishing God from the Old Testament is counter-productive in coping with trauma caused by disaster. In a similar way, cultural geographers Colette Mortreux and Jon Barnett conclude that a strong belief in God's providence and in a special relationship between Tuvalu and God prevent inhabitants of the island from taking necessary precautionary measures to rising sea levels, such as migration, and thus becomes a barrier to adaptation (Rubow 2009:100-103).

In an analysis of local perceptions of climate change and rising sea levels in rural Fiji, geographer Simon Donner argues that weather in a mix of Methodist Christianity and

indigenous Fijian religion is viewed as a divine domain, and climate change therefore conceived as being outside human agency. Rather than attributing climate change and rising sea levels to human actions and thereby considering it possible to change through human agency, weather related events and conditions are attributed to divine power and intervention as rewards for piousness or punishments for not being devout (Donner 2007:232-234).

The study by Donner and those quoted by Rubow thus paint a picture of Christianity in the Pacific as impeding both psychological resilience in disaster situations and vulnerability reduction to climate change and future disasters. My empirical data might also in some ways support these conclusions. As has been argued in chapter 5.2, a belief that Samoa was safe from tsunamis due to the Christian faith of its inhabitants did in some cases seem to have made inhabitants of the villages overtly confident, not taking tsunami warnings and even the earthquake seriously. Kolone also told me that she was confident God would always protect her, like he had done in the tsunami, as long as she did her prayers and lived a good Christian life. Kolone's family was also among the families who had decided to rebuild by the sea and not relocate to higher ground.

However, as will be illustrated in the following, religious interpretations of the tsunami did not mainly lead to passivity and fatalism. Inhabitants of Levao and Salesi did take measures to reduce vulnerability to future disasters, partly guided by religious understandings of the tsunami. As will be argued, actions and attitudes by members of new and mainline churches in promoting or opposing religious change can be analysed as measures to reduce vulnerability and and promote resilience within Christian cosmological understandings.

6.3 The tsunami and the Second Coming: missionary urgency and opportunity

Of the newly established churches in Salesi, all were evangelical and had openly stated missionary purposes. To many pastors, missionaries and core members, providing material assistance in the disaster aftermath was considered an important strategy for proselytising. Vasa of the Holiness church thus stated that the mission of the church had been: "*to help build the houses and preach the word of God at the same time*", showing the grace of God through practical action and material support. Keeping in mind the strong criticism of the financial arrangements of mainline churches and of the alleged greed of mainline pastors, providing material assistance might have been a way of illustrating criticism in practical action, making the point that church affiliation could be about receiving, not only about donations and

economic hardships.

As described in chapter 5.3.3, my experience with Aipo gave me an indication of how a natural occurrence was used in proselytising and especially the Holiness missionaries and pastors were very explicit on how religious understandings of the tsunami had paved the way for their missionary work. Vasa described the time after the tsunami as "*such a good time*", stating that fear and religious perceptions of the tsunami had made proselytising easier: *"people were afraid and had so much remorse and they were ready to listen and accept everything we said".* Aipo was equally clear in his view of the effects of the tsunami on his work as a missionary, referring to the time after the tsunami as "*oh, it was so great, they all repent. They just say 'yes pastor'. It was too easy!*", laughing loudly. In a so-called "*Sabbath seminar*" at the Adventist church, the goal of establishing a church in a nearby and also severely tsunami affected village was described in terms of "*friendship evangelism*", urging church members to show love and friendship to people in difficult emotional and material situations after the disaster as a "*harvesting tool*".

I was, at first, surprised at the way in which my informants of the new churches openly discussed methods for proselytising which to me seemed rather cunning, consciously acting upon people's feelings of remorse, guilt and fear after the tsunami for missionary purposes. To my informants, however, this approach did not seem something to not be proud of as evangelising and proselytising were considered sacred tasks.

Sociologist of religion Stephen Hurt (2010) has underlined the importance of eschatological beliefs in shaping religious groups' attitudes towards worldly events:

> "Their view of eschatology governs their view of current events. Their interpretation of prophecy has had a very significant effect on their perception of world historical events and on their political and social response to those events. On a smaller scale their eschatological views have affected their own history by stimulating evangelistic and missionary endeavours" (Hurt 2010:195).

In a similar way, core members and missionaries of the new churches in Salesi acted upon eschatological interpretations of the tsunami by proselytising and working to change *fono* rules and establish churches in the village. The interpretations of the tsunami as foreboding the Second Coming introduced a greater sense of urgency in proselytising and individual salvation and the ideas of "*being prepared*" and "*ready*" for the Second Coming were frequent

topics at Bible schools of both the Eden, Holiness and Adventist churches. As Aipo told me after the rock slide, "*you need to prepare now,' cos this is God's time*".

As described in chapter 5.4, several informants connected resilience to religious faith. For members of the new churches, being "*prepared*" and "*ready*" generally meant being saved and as was emphasised at Bible study sessions at both the Eden and Adventist churches, living your life in a way so that if Christ came back tomorrow, you would have nothing to fear. Being prepared thus also meant to not fear disasters, but see them as positive signs of the Second Coming as only those who were not "true" Christians would have reason to fear rather than rejoice, as illustrated with Aipo's comments about my fear of the rock slide. Proselytising and church expansion were thus considered important ways in preparing for the Second Coming, building resilience and reducing vulnerability through salvation, both in terms of future disasters and in terms of being spiritually prepared for the Last Judgement.

Interpreting the tsunami as a sign and warning that the Second Coming was near appeared an important motivation for members of the new churches to start working actively to change *fono* rules and establish churches as a part of proselytising strategies. Filia emphasised that the tsunami had been a sign from God that "*this is the right time*" for the *fono* to allow new churches and for herself and the congregation to do whatever they could to bring this about. Some leading members of the new churches also explicitly attributed divine agency in sending the tsunami to make the *fono* allow new churches, seen as an encouragement from God and a way to facilitate proselytising activities and salvation. "*Thanks to the tsunami*", Malo said, "*there are now some more souls up there*", pointing to the sky.

6.4 Restoring social control after the tsunami.

In attitudes to what I analyse as building resilience and reducing vulnerability to future disasters, my informants of the mainline churches also seemed guided by religious interpretations. Some informants emphasised that people had "*learned their lesson*" after the tsunami as the beach *fale* owners were now observing the Sabbath rather than making entertainments for their guests, thus changing the behaviour believed to have angered God. When Malia arranged a picnic for me on my first Sunday in Levao, her parents only allowing her to do so, because she had, falsely, claimed that I had expressed a great desire to go, we were not able to find a place along the beach in Salesi where people would allow us to use the simple picnic *fales* by the side of the road, because it was Sunday. This indicates that

significant changes had in fact taken place, at least compared to the representations of the situation before the tsunami as articulated by my informants.

Others felt that though some changes had taken place after the tsunami, now that the tourism industry was starting to rebuild, it was getting back to pre-tsunami ways. Moana clearly felt that this would cause other disasters, as people had not taken the warning to change their sinful ways seriously; the only way to prevent future disasters being to change the behaviour which had caused it:

> *"And I think it will happen again. They didn't repent what God did, ah? If they act like this every time, I think God will make another punishment for them. More tsunamis or some other disaster will happen. Not only will this part of Samoa, but whole of Samoa be washed away by some other disaster God will give us."*

On a different note, several of my informants felt that problems of excessive alcohol consumption and violent behaviour among the young men had increased markedly in Salesi after the tsunami. I was often warned against walking alone in new Salesi because of it, and I did encounter some harassment which was very different from Levao where the young men generally behaved with polite and what was considered appropriate shyness towards me.

Shortly before my arrival, a case of a young man from Salesi stabbing another had been taken to the national court system and during my stay, the Catholic deacon was attacked while driving through the village, both considered serious offences. According to my informants in Salesi, there never used to be these kinds of problems before the tsunami, which was noted by both the *matais* and the young women, the latter feeling that their male peers had gone astray and could no longer be trusted.

As noted in chapter 4, the new churches all had strong focus on youth groups and activities. Though many mainline church members were critical of the new churches, it was generally acknowledged that they also did some good in bringing especially the young men to church, a demographic group clearly under-represented at church services in the mainline churches. When attending church service and youth activities in the new churches, it was not hard to see why the egalitarian and participatory style, loud rock music played with guitars and keyboards, dancing and joking, and the strong presence of other young people, including young missionaries from Apia, would appeal more to a young audience than the formalised

and less participatory, "*less fun*" services of the mainline churches.

In a conversation about how life in new Salesi was different from what it had been before the tsunami, Moana emphasised increasing problems with disorderly behaviour among the youth as a main reason for changing *fono* rules:

> *"Oh, so many churches now. Because people, especially the youth, very bad behaviour now. So the new church come to give the word from God to rebuild their lives (...) And I think the youth one, they didn't go to church, they don't like to go to church. Those are the ones who make difficulties in the village".*

Moana thus connected violations of village rules to lack of church attendance. Lusi, another female member of the Congregational church in Salesi, also explained the reason for changing *fono* rules in terms of controlling youth with "*bad behaviour*": *One church is not enough for the bad people. We need more religion to this village! That's why the matais opened all the churches in Salesi".* The decision to open up the village to new churches was thus considered meaningful and appropriate by some members of the mainline churches as a solution to lack of respect for village rules and authorities, thereby supporting changing village rules as a way to restore what was considered proper practice and values of *fa'asamoa* with respect for authorities and social control through the new churches.

Based on the interpretations of the tsunami as divine punishment for failing to obey traditional and biblical rules, with people "acting like *palagi"* rather than remembering their Samoan values, restoring *fa'asamoa* and respect for traditional authorities of pastors and *matais* can thus be analysed as measures taken to reduce future vulnerabilities to disasters. Allowing new churches seemed to have made sense to some members of the mainline churches as a way of restoring *fa'asamoa* and thereby reducing vulnerability to disasters.

6.5 Religious and secular approaches to reducing vulnerability

I have so far analysed how people acted upon religious understandings of the tsunami in negotiations of post tsunami religious change, taking action to reduce vulnerabilities within Christian cosmologies. Religious understandings of the tsunami and resilience to disasters were, however, not alone in guiding the actions taken by my informants in post disaster recovery and rebuilding. The majority of Salesi and more than half of Levao had relocated to the plantation grounds a safe distance from the sea after the tsunami and many expressed concerns about how best to protect themselves from both potential future tsunamis and the

recurrent hazards of tropical storms and cyclones. Many were for instance dissatisfied with the standard housing designed by the Samoan government to be built within the 18.000 tala tsunami grant, as they were open style *fales* and did not provide safe shelter from strong winds and had therefore decided to build alternative, and more expensive, homes. It was not necessarily so that informants who expressed strong religious views seemed any less concerned with other aspects of vulnerability reduction. Rather, attitudes and actions seemed guided by both religious and scientific understandings of the tsunami.

My empirical data thus also paint a different picture than the one presented in the beginning of this chapter, indicating that actively acting upon religious interpretations of disaster does not exclude actions based on other understandings or concerns. I therefore find it important to emphasise that the way people respond to and act upon religious interpretations should not be reduced to notions of strict and exclusive causality. I found, like Cecilie Rubow, that "people at the Pacific islands draw on many sources of knowledge" in their understandings and response to disasters (Rubow 2009:94) and my informants also responded to many different concerns, beliefs and priorities.

Just as religious interpretations of the tsunami existed alongside scientific explanations as mutually reinforcing or as peacefully unsolved paradoxes, local responses were influenced by a variety of cosmologies, priorities and purposes, the Christian being one, but not the only, important factor. This also resembles what anthropologist Fredrik Barth (1989) refers to as different streams of cultural traditions, with people interacting and acting in relation to not one particular stream, but many. As argued by Barth:

> "People participate in multiple, more or less discrepant, universes of discourse; they construct different, partial and simultaneous worlds in which they move; their cultural construction of reality springs not from one source and it not of one piece" (Barth 1989:130).

My informants thus actively used several different understandings in various contexts and as mutually complimentary both in understanding the tsunami as analysed in chapter 5 and in taking action to reduce vulnerabilities as analysed here. In the following, the different interpretations, priorities and strategies in post tsunami processes of religious change will be explored further, linking it to deeper conceptions of continuity and change.

6.6 Continuity and change in disaster interpretations and response

As described in chapter 3, representation of continuity with the past was an important element in the construction of what was considered "*true fa'asamoa"*. In the following, I explore how ideals of continuity also underpin understandings of the tsunami and influence attitudes and actions in post tsunami religious change by my informants of mainline churches. I then briefly turn to anthropological literature on conceptions of discontinuity in evangelical Protestant churches in other geographical areas as comparative basis for understanding how ideals of radical change in conversion and eschatology has influenced understandings of the tsunami as radical and positive discontinuity by members of new churches.

6.6.1 Mainline churches: ideals of continuity

In understandings of the tsunami as a punishment, the strict observance of the Sabbath was expressed as an important way of "*keeping with the past*" and the tsunami was by many informants of the mainline churches interpreted as a punishment for failure to do so. Many members of the mainline churches were thus seeing the tsunami as a consequence of change, e.g. tourism developments and imitation of *palagi* ways, people "*acting like a palagi*" instead of respecting village rules and traditions and remembering their "*Samoan motto*". The impression that things were changing for the worse and that people were no longer respecting "*the traditional ways*" were common among my informants of the mainline churches in both villages. By linking the tsunami to tourism developments, imitation of *palagi* lifestyle and lack of respect for traditional values, the tsunami was thus interpreted as a result of resent changes, which were seen to pose a threat to central values of respect, submission to authorities and adherence to traditional rules of behaviour.

Members of mainline churches often presented similar arguments when discussing the decision to allow new churches in Salesi. Those in opposition to allowing new churches, which most of my informants from the mainline churches were, frequently emphasised that in Levao there had been only one church from the beginning and that keeping it that way meant respecting the past and the ways of the forefathers. Netina, the wife of the Congregational pastor in the village, stated that she would leave Levao, her home of 30 years, if any new churches were to establish in the village, because she felt it would be "*too hard to see people abandon their birth religion from the beginning*". The very reason why she liked living in Levao was that there was "*only one church from the beginning till the end*" thus connecting the one church policy to the historic continuity of the village: "*that's why I really like this*

village. There is still the rules and the beliefs of the forefathers, the ancestors", she told me.

The pastor and leading members of the Congregational church in Levao had decided that the church needed a new roof, requiring all *matais* of the village, regardless of religious affiliation, to contribute 500 tala and make one *taulele'a* available for the manual labour. A *matai* and member of the Congregational Church phrased this as showing respect for the ancestors: "*Because there is only one church in Levao. So it's out of respect for our ancestor's decision that everybody has to do their responsibilities to this church, to honour our ancestors*". Contrary to the belief in ancestral spirits causing illnesses, these references to ancestors were not specific and seemed more an overall term to signify people of the general past.

Lani often expressed her views on the situation in Salesi as worrying and problematic: "*I don't know why those stupid people from Salesi want to abandon their roots and go to all those new churches!*" she told me one day driving through the village. To Lani, the maintenance of the old rules allowing only one church in Levao was considered a key component of "*the traditional ways*" and she was worried that the increased diversification of denominations in Salesi would threaten the unity and harmony of the village: "I *would be worried to see what happens in Salesi in 10 years. I think the village is no longer together*".

These arguments of keeping with the past by not allowing new churches was also expressed by some *matais* of the *fono* in Salesi, stating that they had been against changing what was referred to as "*the old ways*" or "*the ways of our forefathers*". As Solomone put it he had been against allowing new churches in the village because he was *"going to obey for what Salesi begin with. The beginning of Salesi village! From the people who were the old ones".* The fact that both Salesi and Levao had existed long before the arrival of missionaries and no churches had thus been present since any "beginning" was never mentioned, which is consistent with the commonly shared conception of Christianity as an inherent part of *fa'asamoa*. Concepts of continuity were thus emphasised by members of the mainline congregations, both in the interpretations of the tsunami and in attitudes towards religious change.

6.6.2 New churches: ideals of rupture and radical change

According to Joel Robbins, evangelical Christianity places great emphasis on change and discontinuity with doctrines of salvation, spiritual rebirth and eschatology (Robbins 2007:10-

12). In anthropological studies of Christian conversion, converts generally represent salvation in terms of radical change and the conversion experience is celebrated as an interruption in the time line of a person's life (Meyer 2010:120-122, Dombrowski 2001:142-158, Robbins 2010:161, Jøssang 2010:159-168)

In anthropologist Birgit Meyer's analysis of Pentecostalism in Ghana (1998), converts are actively encouraged to leave behind everything in their pre-conversion life, including relatives, in order not to fall back into old heathen ways, and constructions of the past in Pentecostal discourse is one of demonizing and complete rejection. The past is viewed as sinful and heathen, representing everything that a born again Christian must separate herself from. The ideal is represented as "making a complete break with the past" through radical self search, cutting family ties and rejecting all cultural and traditional practices (Meyer 1998:317).

In a Bolivian context, anthropologist Asle Jøssang (2010) describes a discourse of radical and sudden change in conversion narratives from Catholicism to Pentecostalism in which a dichotomous separation between pre- and post-conversion life is expressed and constructed. Though analytically, conversion is best described as a continuously evolving process of hybridization with strong and significant continuities with pre-conversion cosmologies, values and practices, both converted individuals themselves and church leaders describe conversion as radical change, idealising the idea of rupture with the past (Jøssang 2010:157-160).

Studying Samoans living in New Zealand who change affiliation from mainline to new, mainly Pentecostal churches, anthropologist Ilana Gershon (2006) argues that though conversion takes place from one form of Protestant Christianity to another, changing church affiliation is articulated as a radical break and as leaving the old life behind (Gershon 2006:158-161). Amongst my informants of the new churches, changing denominational affiliation was also described in terms of discontinuity and my new church informants seemed eager to emphasise just how radically their lives had changed. Narratives often seemed to follow a pattern of living a sinful life, being unhappy and doing "*bad things like drinking, just roaming the streets with friends, getting into trouble*", as Lomi of the Eden church described it, while the experience of being "*born again*" or "*saved*", powerful images of radical change, was represented as everything which the old life was not. In the quotation forming the title of this thesis, a Tavai of the Adventist church stated that the goal should be to "*forget who we are*

and let the people free", thus articulating an ideal of radical break with the past.

Another manifestation of an ideal of discontinuity were eschatological interpretations of the tsunami as a sign of the Second Coming, articulated as the most important change of them all. Interpreting the tsunami within eschatological understandings of time, the tsunami was thereby seen as foreboding radical and ideally positive change. The Second Coming was generally described as "*really exiting*" and members of new churches often reminded me that only those who were not saved had any reason to worry. The final judgement was articulated as something to look forward to, at least ideally, though some informants also expressed concerns, especially for members of their families who were not saved and would therefore not go to heaven.

My empirical data thus reiterate the analysis by Robbins that discontinuity and radical rupture is emphasised and idealised in both individual conversion narratives and in the emphasis on the Second Coming of Christ. Robbins argues that Christianity in general holds fundamental ideals of change and discontinuities: "Christianity represents time as a dimension in which radical change is possible. It provides for the possibility, indeed the salvational necessity, of the creation of ruptures between the past, the present, and the future." (Robbins 2007:10-11). In the light of my empirical data, this statement is clearly an overtly broad generalization of the variety of expressions of Christianities in my field, but what Robbins is concerned with here is overall doctrines rather than local variations. What is evident in my empirical data is that members of mainline and new churches expressed radically different ideals of change and continuity, the attitudes of new churches in many ways incorporating the notions and ideals of change in conversion and eschatology described by Robbins, while members of the mainline churches focused on (re)establishing historical continuity and respecting the ways of the past and the ancestors.

In the interpretations of the tsunami and approach to post tsunami processes of religious change, the attitudes of members of new churches thus differ markedly from ideals of continuity and maintaining *fa'asamoa* and *"traditional ways*" as expressed by members of mainline churches. I suggest that different interpretations of the tsunami and attitudes towards post tsunami religious change are partly manifestations of different ideals of time, the past, change and continuity and that these different interpretations influenced the attitudes taken and arguments used in bringing about or opposing religious change. Allowing new churches

in the post disaster context seems to have made sense to at least some informants of the mainline churches as restoring village order, harmony and respect for authorities in the chaotic post disaster situation as well as reducing vulnerability to future disasters by ensuring that people kept the Sabbath holy. When the tsunami is interpreted as a punishment for lack of religious adherence, simply "*bringing more religion to the village*" seems an appropriate decision for reducing vulnerability to disasters. The establishment of new churches might thus have made sense to differently positioned individuals with different motivations, promoting change and salvation before the Second Coming for members of the new churches and re-establishing proper practice of *fa'asamoa* and respect for authorities from the perspectives of some members of mainline churches.

In the following chapter, I explore the new churches in relation to conceptions of tradition and *fa'asamoa*. Like the different models and ideals of change and continuity analysed here, chapter 7 will analyse different ideals of the individual and social control in mainline and new churches, discussing the new churches as a possible inversion of tradition.

7 Changing Christianities: implications for tradition and *fa'asamoa*

Chapter 6 illustrated how members of new and mainline churches expressed radically different ideals of continuity with the past and of radical change in interpretations of the tsunami as well as in attitudes towards post tsunami religious change. In this chapter, I explore and analyse another area of difference between members of new and mainline churches, that of the individual and social control. I will illustrate how members of new churches emphasise and utilise concepts of individual rights in bringing about religious change, whereas members of mainline churches generally emphasised social control and saw individual rights as contrary to the *fa'asamoa*. The latter part of this chapter discusses the new churches as a possible inversion of tradition and explores how religious interpretations of the tsunami are playing a part in the attitudes towards tradition and *fa'asamoa* in the new churches, and how processes of post disaster religious change are influencing attitudes to and practices of tradition and *fa'asamoa.*

7.1 Changing ideals: communality and individual rights

As accounted for in chapter 3, communality and social control were emphasised and idealised in representations of *fa'asamoa*. As will be analysed in the following, members of new and mainline churches articulated radically different ideals of the relationship between individual rights and social control.

7.1.1 Individual rights and *fa'asamoa*

The concept of individual rights was frequently discussed amongst my informants. Most informants of the mainline churches were sceptical to the relevance of individual rights in Samoa and even saw it as contrary to the *fa'asamoa* with communality and social control as defining elements. During a period of high expenses for *fa'alavelave* and church donations, Kolone told me that although *fa'asamoa* caused worries and hardships, she still loved it and would not want to change anything:

> "*So that's our Samoan culture. It's very hard! But I believe, that is my opinion, that if we didn't have our fa'asamoa, it would be just like those overseas countries. Everybody having their own personal rights! And you know, that's why Samoa is so peaceful. There's no police to come! It's only the families and the village*".

Kolone thus contrasted *fa'asamoa* with individual rights, arguing that the former made Samoa more peaceful than Western countries where individual rights were prioritised over social control. Kolone was also strongly opposed to the idea of children having rights as directly adversary to *fa'asamoa*: *"That's the European way, ai? That's not in the fa'asamoa. The children don't have any rights! I think in your country, the parents can go to the prison for beating their children*". Corporal punishments of children were very common amongst my informants, also articulated as a defining feature of *fa'asamoa* and contrasted with *palagi* ways of child rearing, stating that Samoa children were tough and cheeky and needed a beating, contrary to *palagi* children who were "*too weak*" for corporal punishments.

Lani had noticed an increased focus on individual rights, especially among the youth: *"That's the word I always hear these days, the rights. They always talk about their own personal rights*", she told me. Lani had cut off the hair of a student for not following school and village regulations of short hair for boys, making the boy in question very angry and accusing her of violations of his "*rights*". Lani laughingly repeated her answer to me: "*This is the village! We do things the traditional way. If they want their own individual rights, they can move to some school in town*", which were generally believed to be less traditional and more influenced by *palagi* ways. Lani thus articulated the concept of individual rights, especially when it came to children and youth as contrary to her conceptions of traditional village ways of social control and subordination to authorities.

As presented in chapter 1 and illustrated in chapter 3, conceptions and representations of tradition and *fa'asamoa* were frequently articulated as oppositions to conceptions of "the West", codifying ideals and practices which most differentiated Samoan cultural identity from the *fa'apalagi*. In the empirical data presented here, these representations of *fa'asamoa* took the form of a dualistic opposition between *fa'asamoa* as guided by communality, respect and subordination and *palagi* ways of individual freedom and lack of social control.

7.1.2 Emphasising individual rights in post tsunami change

As noted in chapter 4, doctrines of individual salvation in the new churches as well as more egalitarian forms of interaction and religious practice were markedly different from ideal representation of individual subordination to the community and respect for traditional authorities in common representations of *fa'asamoa*. The concept of individual rights, including the right to religious freedom, was often used explicitly by members of new

churches as argument to change village rules. Filia emphasised the right to religious freedom as more important than subordination to *fono* decisions and social control, using the words "*freedom*" and "*rights*" frequently during our conversations about religious change in the village. When asked what would happen if the Eden church was to be banned again, Filia told me she would do anything to fight the *fono* and exercise her "*religious freedom*": "*I don't care what anyone will say! If they* [the fono] *try and stop us, I will come and wash them away!*", the image of being washed away possibly hinting at a new tsunami. Tavita of the Adventist church also emphasised that people were free now with the new *fono* rules. He felt that members of the mainline churches "*wanted to go back to the oldest days, to what our parents believe*", which he contrasted with what he felt ought to be happening after the tsunami: "*to forget who we are and let the people free*", stating that the establishment of new churches had ensured their "*rights to worship as we want*". The ideas of individual rights and freedom were thus emphasised by members of new churches and used as arguments in negotiations of religious change.

I have argued that many members of the mainline churches explicitly or indirectly connected the tsunami to lack of respect for traditional authorities and values of the *fa'asamoa.* In the attitudes taken to future reductions of vulnerability, enhancing respect for traditional rules and authorities, changing behaviour and attending service on Sundays were seen as necessary measures to avoid future disasters. The interpretations, attitudes and actions thus attributed the tsunami to lack of respect for the *fa'asamoa* and traditional authorities, the solutions being more social control and more submission of the individual to the community.

In the eschatological interpretations of the tsunami and attitudes to religious change by members of new churches, the importance and urgency of individual salvation and rights were emphasised and utilized to facilitate religious change, based on arguments of individual rights. I thus argue that different interpretations of the tsunami enhanced differences between mainline and new church members in terms of ideals of individuality and social control, a difference of actively promoting change and individual rights or emphasising tradition, continuity and social control.

7.2 The individual in *fa'asamoa* - beyond ideals

According to Bradd Shore, it is a common Samoan practice to present an idealized account of what should be and letting it pass for what is (Shore 1982:14). When discussing the new

churches in relation to *fa'asamoa* and tradition, it is important to keep in mind that ideal representations are thus that: ideals. The continuously expressed emphasis on social control, communality and submission of the individual to traditional authorities are emic representations, constructed partly as inversions of conceptions of *fa'apalagi* and the West.

Anthropologist Anthony P. Cohen (1989, 1994) underlines the importance of not assuming that a problematic relationship of individual to society is a purely Western preoccupation. According to Cohen, it has been a highly problematic tendency of social anthropology to identify individual consciousness with structures of social organisation, thus reducing individuals to cultural stereotypes (Cohen 1989:12). Cohen criticises anthropology for failing to extend to others a recognition of the personal complexities which we perceive in ourselves, thereby constructing an "essential difference between 'us', individualistic (sometimes preciously so) and creative, and 'them', apparently collectivist and passive" (Cohen 1994:2)

Analysing socialization processes in Samoa, Jeanette Mageo (1989) argues that child rearing in Samoa aims at implanting a collective orientation and children are taught to serve and obey those older than themselves and to think of themselves as a part of a group rather than as an individual. According to Mageo, an important concept in the Samoan language is the word *tautalaitiiti*, meaning literally "to talk when little", used when socialising children into the heavily hierarchical system of respect, subordination and service to elders and those of higher rank (Mageo 1989:395). For adults, though the actual term *tautalaitiiti* is not used, its meaning, to presume above one's status, is considered equally inappropriate and it remains an idiom for the expression of rebellion against authority. The representation of the docile, passive and cooperative person not pursuing individual desires or asserting individual rights is thus seen as an ideal representation personhood and virtue in *fa'asamoa* (ibid:394-397).

However, Mageo states that this representation is not comprehensive as it describes only the ideal form of submission and restraint, failing "to take into account both the cheeky opposite and the poisonous inversion of this cultural ideal. All three are essential to understanding the dynamics of Samoan social reality" (ibid:417). Bradd Shore (1982, 1995) also notes that beneath ideals of hierarchy, subordination and respect, Samoan understandings of person and social control are much more complex and ripe with ambiguities. Discussing power and authority in the *fa'asamoa*, Shore argues that for all the obvious preoccupations with rank and authority, Samoans have "a marvellous sense of the absurd, especially in reference to those

very figures to whom they express the greatest deference" (Shore 1995:145). According to Shore, there is considerable ambiguity built into the Samoan political system, and authority is continuously challenged either openly through aggression and violence or subtly through humour. Ethnographic accounts focusing solely on chiefly authority and respect thus paints too rigid a picture of Samoan society, in which the individual is completely subordinated social control. Rather, alongside the dominant stress on conformity and authority is a rebellion of individuals against this subordination and the concept of social control and individual freedom are two sides of Samoan understandings of personhood (ibid:178, Shore 1982:185-189).

According to Shore, Samoans generally sort human behaviour into two fundamental categories: one stemming from individual will and desire (*amio*) and one of more prescriptive "social conduct" of what is considered appropriate behaviour for socially defined statuses (*aga*) (Shore 1982:154). The notion of social control is conceptualized as public constraint over private impulses, e.g. the imposition of *aga* over *amio*. While generally underlining the need for social control, Shore's informants equally emphasised a desire to follow their own impulses and desires: "My informants readily and quite un self-consciously expressed this opposition between a strong commitment to public control over other's behaviour and a desire to free themselves of such constraints" (ibid:186). Similar to the contextual convictions described in chapter 5.5, Shore describes this as two distinct and complementary voices of the speaker rather than internal contradiction or conflict (ibid:188).

Through my fieldwork, I observed and were told of many cases of both open aggression and ridiculing satire of authorities. Though significantly downplayed and even denied by some informants in Levao, acts of aggression and violations of village rules were happening in both villages. When asked about disobedience of village rules, *matais* of Levao would generally answer that there were no such problems in the village: "*here the fa'asamoa is very strong, we have no naughty boys in this village*" as one elderly *matai* of Levao claimed. However, as I participated in *fono* meetings, it became clear that violence and disobedience to the *fono* did happen, even among the *matais* themselves, who were ideally represented as personification of social virtue (se also Mageo 1989:396). Disobedience of village *fono* rules also took the form of violating rules of sexual conduct. Two cases of repeated adultery committed by women in Levao were brought before the *fono* during my stay in the village, both considered serious violations and lack of respect for authorities with heavy penalties due.

A thorough understanding of the complex conceptions of the individual and personhood in Samoa is beyond the scope of this thesis as well as of my empirical data. The tentative argument I wish to make here is that the idea of the individual and of acting upon individual desires and convictions is not in itself a alien notion in Samoa. Going beyond ideal representations and following Cohen's arguments, I do not suggest an analytical approach to Samoan culture and understandings of personhood as inherently or essentially collective or imply that ideas of individual freedom and wishes are foreign concepts imposed on Samoa by new religious agents of change.

Rather, I argue that the ideal representation of individual subordination to social control in representations of *fa'asamoa* does not capture the complexities and ambiguities of the relationship between the individual and the community as continual processes, interactions and negotiations of *aga* and *amio* with both subtle acts of resistance through humour, less restrained ones of aggression and covert ones of adultery. Rather than introducing new and radically different concepts of the individual, it thus seems that new churches provided people with a language of "*individual rights*" and "*religious freedom*" in which inherent ambiguities can be expressed within a Christian context and used in promoting religious change. In the following, I explore this aspect of new churches in more depth, analysing new churches as a form of social and cultural critique, drawing upon analysis of the establishment of new churches and tradition in other geographical contexts.

7.3 New churches as social and cultural critique

In an analysis of Pentecostal conversions among Native Americans in Alaska, anthropologist Kirk Dombrowski describes how members of Pentecostal churches actively reject and oppose tradition, encouraging complete disassociation from symbols, practises and politics having to do with constructions of native culture and tradition. Dombrowski argues that such "dramatic denial of culture" (Dombrowski 2001:15) has special appeal to people whose particular culture has somehow become an almost unbearable burden, which he argues is the case for Native Americans in Alaska, struggling to make ends meet in a capitalist market economy while living up to ideals of native lifestyle and traditional practices (ibid:183). In Dombrowski's analysis, new churches provide people with a language for expressing criticism and discontent with elements of culture: "church members find themselves recognizing and giving voice to powerful anticultural feelings - feelings that express many people's disappointment at failing to achieve meaning in conventional, local cultural ways" (ibid:158)

New churches thus offer a language to criticise native identity projects and constructions of "traditional" culture which are experienced as burdensome and meaningless (ibid:122).

Discussing Protestant conversion in a Guatemalan village, anthropologist Jon Schackt (1986) argues that changing religious affiliation provides an alternative to elaborate Catholic practices of offering and exchange. When converting to Protestantism, one is also excluded from participating in the traditional socio-political structures of serving "cargoes", a hierarchy of public offices with power but also significant expenses and members of the new Protestant churches thus free themselves of costly and time consuming obligations in village community and religious celebrations. According to Schackt, Protestantism provides a language for criticising traditional practices, economies and social organisation with ideological support from missionaries and new religious doctrines: "Perhaps in societies so steeply immersed in "religion" even social critique must clothe itself in religious concepts" (Schackt 1986:119).

In the context of Samoan diaspora in New Zealand, Ilana Gershon discusses motivations for and experiences of leaving so-called mainline churches and joining Pentecostal congregations. Gershon argues that when converting from mainline churches, Samoans are leaving denominations deeply involved with ritual exchange and moral economy in favour of churches with strong injunctures against the practice and principals of ritual exchange. Like my informants of the new churches in Salesi, Gershon describes how members of new churches express strong criticism of the practices of *fa'alavelave* and church donations, arguing that changing church affiliation offers an alternative to the pressure, competition and economic hardships of both family and church obligations (Gershon 2006:155-157).

With the critique of *fa'alavelave* and high expenses for church donations, new churches in Salesi also provided members with a forum and a language for expressing social critique and free themselves of what was experienced as costly and oppressive traditions and obligations. Members of the new churches expressed criticism of traditional practices which were considered burdensome and unjust with the Bible as legitimizing ideology, thus expressing criticism from within a framework of Christianity, itself considered a cornerstone of *fa'asamoa.*

It is important to note that the discussions and criticism of *fa'alavelave* costs and practice were not limited to, nor were they necessarily introduced by members of new churches. As

expenses and especially monetary expectations seemed to be increasing for both *fa'alavelave* and church, the discontent felt is likely to arise from actual economic hardships rather than Christian ideologies. I thus suggest that rather than introducing critical attitudes, new churches in Salesi gave people a forum and context based on biblical authority in which to voice their discontent and as well as a possibility for actual change.

7.4 Religious change as inversion of tradition

As noted in chapter 1, Nicholas Thomas suggests that new Churches in the Pacific actively define themselves in opposition to tradition. A similar analysis is articulated by Jacqueline Ryle in her analysis of Methodism and Pentecostalim in Fiji (Ryle 2004). So far, I have argued that new churches in Salesi expressed ideals markedly different from common representations of *fa'asamoa.* I have illustrated various ways in which members of new churches emphasised values of individual rights rather than communalism and social control and radical change rather than continuity with the past. Members of new churches also openly criticised and defined themselves against practices of *fa'alavelave* and *folafola*. In the following, I discuss whether the new churches in my field are expressions of inversion of tradition and rejecting of culture.

According to Dombrowski, his informants of the Pentecostal churches were not just anti-cultural in that they rejected what was considered native culture and defined themselves actively against it, they were also anti-Cultural, the capital C indicating that they were opposed to the idea of culture per se, not just any particular expression of culture (Dombrowski 2001:174). According to Dombrowski, a concept of individual salvation available to everyone regardless of social characteristics, background and status, also manifest in the doctrines of new churches in my fieldwork context, makes culture not only irrelevant in the higher goal of salvation, but the idea of culture as socially defining is also regarded as an obstacle to salvation (ibid:158,174).

Several core members of the new churches in Salesi did occasionally express themselves explicitly against conceptions of tradition and culture. Lomi of the Eden church thus articulated the biggest difference between new and mainline churches in terms of involvement with tradition: "*They are caught up with tradition. It's all about tradition, it's not about God!*". Tavai and other members of the Adventist church also told me outright that their church "*doesn't accept the Samoan culture".* In addition to criticising *fa'alavelave* and *folafola*, the

new churches also did not condone drinking of *ava* and the Adventist and Holiness churches did not support use of fine mats in ceremonial gift giving and were very critical of a traditional form of apology in cases of serious offences between groups involving humble presentations of fine mats (*ifoga*).

To most informants of the new churches, however, being critical of traditional practices did not mean that they considered themselves in direct opposition to *fa'asamoa*, nor did they actively work against tradition per se. As Vasa expressed his view of the relationship between Samoan culture and his work as a pastor: *"The gospel is the way to transform the culture. It's not that we are against the culture. I love my culture, you know? It's just that the culture needs to be Christianized*". I also participated in a so-called "*culture camp*" with the youth group of the Holiness church, in which selected traditional practices were rehearsed among the youth.

Malo of the Eden church also stated that he thought of *fa'asamoa* as both positive and important, referring to it as being "*from God*" and thus in line with divine purpose, compared to *palagi* culture which had been corrupted and was full of sin. Unlike Dombrowski's informants, it seemed that my informants of the new churches were defining themselves against certain practices and how *fa'asamoa* was conducted by some individuals, stating as Lomi did: "*it's not a problem of culture, it's a problem of the people*". The criticism of the *fa'alavelave* was also not articulated as a critique of the practice itself or of *fa'asamoa* in general, but a current practice of it, corrupted by monetisation, competition and greed, which was felt to be in direct opposition to the Bible.

Gershon argues that Samoans changing affiliation are not switching moral orders, but changing the ways in which they relate to the moral orders in which they participate (Gershon 2006:148). Whereas practices of *fa'alavelave* and *folafola* place great emphasis on public display of moral conduct such as showing love and solidarity with family and displaying piousness through large church donations, new Churches represent an internalisation of morality as something taking place between the individual and God and separated from the public gaze (ibid:158-160). In a similar way, though members of the new churches in Salesi expressed strong criticism of key traditional practices and values of continuity and social control, the attitudes did not seem to be one of complete rejection of *fa'asamoa* as such, but criticising certain practices of it, namely the aspects of public display, competition and exploitation. What takes place is thereby not a rejection of morality, but an internalization of

moral conduct, removing it from the arena of public display and evaluation.

It thus seems that members of new churches were not entirely rejecting tradition or opposing the concept of culture per se. In the following, I suggest one possible analysis of the processes of religious change and implications on tradition and *fa'asamoa* as a re-arranging of value hierarchies, based on Joel Robbins' analysis of conversion as a process of changing the relative value attributed to different elements of culture.

7.5 Changing value hierarchies

Joel Robbins (2007, 2009) discusses change and continuity in conversion in a study of the Urapmin people of Papua New Guinea, who converted to a "charismatic Christianity recognisably western in origin" (Robbins 2009:111) in the 1970s. Robbins argues that radical change in cosmology has indeed taken place, though continued belief in ancestral spirits persists. Drawing on anthropologist Louis Dumont's theoretical approach to social hierarchies, Robbins analyses the relative values attributed to various elements of post conversion Urapmin culture and beliefs, arguing that rather than analysing continued existence of belief in pre-conversion spirits as underlying continuity with the past, focus should be on how people relate to these spirits and what value is attached to them (ibid:110).

As argued in chapter 3, continued belief in ancestral spirits among my informants was incorporated into a Christian cosmology of God and Satan as opposite and struggling powers. In the case of the Urapmin, Robbins argues that the spirit world as a whole has been deprived of their former creative and productive powers, as this contradicted the more important belief in the Christian God as the omnipotent and sole creator, and their powers limited to only comprising less valued destructive and harmful capacities. Belief in spirits had thus not been eliminated with conversion to Christianity, but the value attributed to them and how they were acted upon had changed profoundly. What is important is thus not what cultural elements exist or persist, but how various elements are ranked according to each other in a value hierarchy (ibid:112-119, Robbins 2007:6).

This analytical approach to change as a redefinition of value hierarchies might also shed some light on processes of change in tradition and *fa'asamoa* with the establishment of new churches. With the interpretations of the tsunami as a sign that the Second Coming was rapidly approaching, salvation and proselytising were considered increasingly urgent and

important by members of new churches. My empirical data also indicates that these eschatological expectations affected attitudes towards tradition. Malo thus stated that the rapidly approaching Second Coming was rendering the practice of culture and tradition unimportant as he repeatedly explained his view of culture: "*culture is an institution drafted by God to keep people together until the Second Coming*". In a similar way, Aipo expressed great pride in Samoan culture, but also underlined that now was the time to focus on God, not on culture: "*I like my culture, you know? But culture can't save the people, only Jesus can*". In these statements, the attitude to Samoan culture is not that of radical rejection or inversion. Rather, the approach seemed to be that cultural concerns ought to take a back-seat now that the Second Coming was near and all energy should be focused on personal salvation and proselytising. It seems that for members of the new churches, the tsunami as a sign of "*the last days*" meant that culture and tradition had lost its importance and that individual salvation now was all that mattered.

As described in chapter 4, members and pastors of the new churches had been participating in a number of traditional practices such as *ava* ceremonies and exchange of food, goods and money when meeting with the *fono* of Salesi after the tsunami. When asked about the use of these practices, Malo of the Eden church responded that "*tradition is the door that we enter through. But once we're in, we don't take the door with us. That would just be a burden*". It is clear through the use of this allegory that Malo thought of tradition as a means to achieve something more important, e.g. establishing a church in Salesi, proselytising and expanding the outreach of the church. As the new churches did not condone drinking of *ava*, the members would toss the *ava* over their shoulders rather than drinking it when participating in these ceremonies.

The way in which the changes in church life had been brought about illustrates that the new churches have used traditional lines of power, *ava* and exchange ceremonies in their goal of bringing new churches to the village rather than openly challenging traditional practices or authorities. Members of both the Eden, Holiness and Adventist churches also underlined that they respected the authority of the *fono* and that they were in no way opposed to the *fa'amatai*, but if a village *fono* would forbid new churches they would fight it and not accept the *fono* decision, as illustrated in Filia's statements earlier in this chapter. The *fa'amatai* is thus not rejected, but should the *fono* make decisions in direct opposition to goals of proselytising and individual salvation, the latter was clearly valued higher and the authority of

the *fono* considered less important. Practices of tradition and *fa'asamoa* were thus not rejected, but subordinated values of salvation, proselytising and church expansion. I therefore suggest that the question of new churches, tradition and *fa'asamoa* is best analysed as redefining priorities and changing value attributed to different elements and ideals rather than an introduction of foreign elements and values and an inversion and rejection of tradition.

7.6 Closing observations: some indications of change

So far, this chapter has analysed implications of religious change from the perspective of different attitudes to and prioritisations of tradition and *fa'asamoa* in new and mainline churches. Members of new churches expressed markedly different ideals and priorities than commonly shared conceptions of *fa'asamoa*, and members of mainline churches often expressed concern that the establishment of new churches posed a direct threat to *fa'asamoa* and that the new churches would undermine the importance of culture. Leone, a member of the Congregational church in Salesi, thus expressed his concerns about the new churches and their lack of community responsibility and respect for traditional authorities, especially regarding *fa'alavelave*: "*the new churches, they don't really like that. They're more like 'Oh no, you do your own thing'. You see, the culture is sort of starting to, you know, break down with this new kind of thinking".* Pelesala, the pastor of the congregational church in Salesi also believed that with the establishment of new churches "*people will miss out on the value of the culture. That's what saddens me. Because we are Samoans and we are known through our culture*". As noted in chapter 6, Lani even predicted the breakdown of Salesi village, stating that in 10 years the village would no longer "*be together*".

Whether or not such radical cultural change will indeed follow from the establishment of new churches is, I believe, too soon to tell. Some practical changes in both *fa'alavelave* and social organisation might, however, be identified from my empirical data, relating to the practice of *saofa'i* and in the functioning of the Women's Committee.

My informants of Salesi told me that some families had stated conducting *saofa'is* on Sundays when travelling was not considered appropriate, thereby limiting the amounts of guests and exchange and especially preventing high ranking members of the extended family and pastors from showing up, who would be expecting to be presented with large amounts of money and food. Leone, himself a *matai* of Salesi, believed this to be caused by the influence of the new churches:

"*I think it's like people are becoming more materialistic, don't want to share their goods with other people, you know? Well, I suppose that's the trend. People are starting to keep it in our own little circle. All these new churches, creeping in. Trying to keep things to themselves. I think that's where that part came from".*

In Leone's view, this change of practice of the *saofa'i* was directly related to the presence of the new churches, believing that they were the ones to advise people in this direction by advocating not spending money on *fa'alavelave*.

Another change possibly related to the establishment of new churches was taking place in the Women's Committees. After the tsunami, the Committees in both Levao and Salesi had not been functioning very well and none of my informants seemed to remember when the last meeting had been held in either of the villages. Several women of Levao felt that the unity and close connections between the women had weakened after the tsunami, partly because some women did not bother to show up for Committee meetings and did not respect the traditional female authorities. Poula, a woman of Levao, thus described the situation in the group of women after the tsunami:

"*We're not connecting. That's how I feel! Before, the Women's committee used to get together and weave fine mats. But now we hardly ever do that (...) Like some members would attend, the others couldn't be bothered. That's how it is! Others couldn't care less".*

Poula felt the community feeling among the women, "*the bonding*" as she called it, had been broken after the tsunami. Lani also got emotional when talking about changes in the group of women; especially how she felt the traditional authority of some women of the village had been undermined. Lani lamented an increasing lack of respect for the traditional authorities of the Committee, stating that some women no longer cared if they were scolded or fined for not showing up for joint activities. Lani felt that this was directly related to the religious changes taking place in Salesi and with individuals and families from Levao changing affiliation, which had caused women from the new churches to neglect the joint activities and responsibilities:

"So them, choosing to go to other religions, it's just like cutting themselves away from us, because as I say, nowadays there's more gathering for church activities rather than because of traditional activities. And them going up there and they chose to go to other churches. So we seldom see them, we seldom meet them, we seldom talk to them. And that's very sad".

Lani thus described the social consequences of attending new churches as very serious, with images of the women cutting themselves away from the community ("us") signalling a rather radical break with the rest of the village. I never saw any of my informants from Levao, who had joined the new churches in Salesi, participating in any of the communal activities for the women in the village. Filia also seemed eager to emphasise that she didn't have any time for these things any more, as she was so busy with church activities, and explicitly told me not to ask her any questions about the Women's Committees, as she did not know and really did not care. From my observations, Lani was right: there were more gatherings for religious than traditional activities. The women of the new churches were busy with their own women's groups, fund-raising and Bible school activities, and did not participate in joint village activities, which were dominated by women of the Congregational church.

It thus seems that the establishment of new churches is affecting the social organisation of the village by impeding the functioning of the Women's Committee. Practically, the women of the new churches were busy with activities in their own churches and therefore neglected the responsibilities to the Committee. Also, based on the analysis of this chapter, it seemed that new churches were actively promoting ideals of individual rights over social control which might have lead to an undermining of the traditional authority of Committee leaders. The new churches were explicitly prioritising religious matters and goals of salvation, proselytising and church expansion over traditional and cultural activities and values, and opting out of the Committee and other communal responsibilities was thus based on both the general doctrines and attitudes of the new churches and on the interpretations of the tsunami as rendering culture and tradition unimportant compared to religious purposes and activities.

8 Concluding reflections: disaster, social change and beyond

This thesis has taken its departure - analytically as well as empirically - in a disaster, but has also gone significantly beyond narrow understandings of disasters as beginning with impact and ending in reconstruction. My approach has been to study the process rather than the event of a disaster, taking local interpretations and everyday concerns, conditions and strategies of members of the disaster affected population into consideration. In this final chapter I propose some conclusions based on the analysis and discussions of the thesis as a whole on the topics of local understandings, social change, and the role and application of anthropology in disaster research and application.

8.1 Local understandings of disaster

The empirical data and analysis of this thesis has illustrated how members of an affected population make sense of disaster based on existing cultural categories of meaning, in my empirical data mainly within Christian cosmologies. The tsunami, experienced as something radically new and unprecedented was incorporated into Christian understandings of morality, behaviour, sin and salvation.

8.1.1 Logics of continuity and discontinuity

In interpretations by members of new churches, the tsunami was mainly understood as a sign of the Second Coming and as a warning to turn to God and be saved before it was too late. I have argued that the tsunami was interpreted in terms of ideals and expectations of discontinuity, with the tsunami foreboding the most radical and celebrated change of them all, the Second Coming of Christ, and with the subsequently increased urgency of proselytising and salvation. The attitudes towards religious change also incorporated ideals of discontinuity, to "*forget who we are and let the people free*" with members of new churches actively utilising the tsunami, post tsunami recovery needs and religious interpretations in facilitating change.

Many of my informants of the mainline churches expressed understandings of the tsunami as a form of divine punishment for failing to respect both biblical and traditional rules of appropriate behaviour on Sundays. In attitudes towards the establishment of new churches, members of mainline churches also generally emphasised the importance of historic

continuity and respect for "*the ancestor's ways*", and maintaining old rules of only one or two mainline churches in a village was seen as a key component of this.

Analytically, two different conceptions and reactions emerge. The new churches emphasised a model of discontinuity, actively using Christian cosmologies and understandings of the tsunami to facilitate religious, social and economic change and defining themselves against values of continuity, communality and social control. Mainline churches, on the other hand, emphasised models of continuity, interpreting the tsunami as a consequence of change and failure to stay true to the *fa'asamoa* and traditional ways, therefore promoting more social control and working to re-establish what was considered true *fa'asamoa*.

These different models of continuity and discontinuity were both expressed within the frame of Christian cosmologies. I have therefore emphasised that the widespread expressions of Christian interpretations should not be attempted reduced to one coherent Christian understanding of disasters. Many different, and in some respects adversary, expressions of Christian understandings were articulated by members of different denominations, and no singular *the* Christian understanding of the tsunami can be concluded. This underlines the diversity and heterogeneity of Christianity, more appropriately referred to in the plural as Christianit*ies* of my field.

8.1.2 The coexistence of religious and secular understandings

The strong presence of religious understandings of disasters did not exclude non-religious ones. On the contrary, the tsunami affected population of Levao and Salesi combined different religious and secular understandings in making sense of the disaster, alternating between various interpretations as mutually supportive rather than exclusive. Acting upon religious understandings in reducing vulnerabilities within Christian cosmologies, did not imply that people refrained from taking action to reduce vulnerability in non-religious ways.

My study has thus given some insights into the conceptional relationship between religious and secular interpretations and understandings of disasters in a Samoan context. Rather than attempting to conclude one coherent local interpretation of disasters, I have underlined the multivocality and heterogeneity of understandings, and illustrated how my informants alternated between religious and secular scientific understandings to make sense of the tsunami. Taking seriously people's religious interpretations of a disaster does thereby not

mean rejecting the importance of secular and scientific ones.

Similar to the analytical position of Christina Anderskov (Anderskov 2004:92), the aim of my study has been to explore not only what a disaster does to people, but also what people do with disasters. The theoretical and analytical approach and inspiration of this thesis has been that people respond to disasters based upon their perceptions of them and that understanding local interpretations is of vital importance in understanding post disaster response and behaviour.

The analysis of this thesis has illustrated that making sense of novel events from already existing categories and cosmologies does not necessarily result in reproduction and continuity. Rather, my informants acted upon religious understandings to reduce vulnerability and to bring about or oppose social change. I have illustrated how disaster response and local approaches to reducing vulnerability are based on perceptions and interpretations of the tsunami, underlining that in order to understand one, we must understand the other. If we are to make sense of how people respond to disasters and act, or fails to act, to reduce vulnerability, understanding local perceptions is of vital importance. In the following, I formulate some conclusions on the topic of post disaster response and social change.

8.2 Disasters and social change

Studying disasters from a processual perspective has given insights into post tsunami processes of change. I have approached the question of change and continuity in disaster aftermath from a perspective of religious beliefs and organisation as one example of processes of post disaster social change. However, as this thesis has illustrated, processes of religious change is by no means limited to clearly defined "religious spheres", but is highly interconnected to wider social, economic and traditional aspects of my informants' lives and the important and pervasive emic concept of *fa'asamoa*.

The establishment of new churches after the tsunami was considered a very significant change by both members of new and mainline churches. Based on my analytical conclusions, it appears that the new churches also create potential for significant change in social, economic, and traditional spheres of life in the affected communities. Most members of new churches were explicitly critical of practices considered key and defining elements of *fa'asamoa*, such as the *fa'alavelave,* and in some contexts defined themselves in direct opposition to tradition.

My analysis has also shown that members of new churches expressed ideals of discontinuity and individual rights, which were radically different from core values of social control and historical continuity in common representations of *fa'asamoa* and as expressed by members of mainline churches.

However, concluding that the tsunami is introducing and facilitating radical change and opposition to tradition and *fa'asamoa* through the establishment of new churches would also not be a sufficient analysis for three reasons. Firstly, processes of religious change were already taking place locally, nationally and globally. Understanding how the tsunami facilitated religious change is therefore a part of understanding longer and wider processes of religious change happening in Samoa and beyond, related to the global expansion of Protestant evangelical churches. I thus argue that though actual and significant religious changes in the villages of my study had taken place as a response to the tsunami and religious interpretations thereof, this is also a part of ongoing processes of change taking place in the villages of my study, in Samoa in general and on a global level.

Secondly, though seemingly radically different and explicitly opposed to central practices and values of *fa'asamoa* and tradition, I have argued that new churches are not so much introducing new concepts to a Samoan context as they are providing people with opportunities and a language for expressing discontent and social critique, also felt outside the context of new churches. New churches thus created a forum for expressing criticism and opting out of traditional authority and obligations based on biblical and pastoral authorities.

Analysing different attitudes towards individual rights and social control, I have also argued that though ideals of individual rights expressed by new churches do appear radically different from central elements of common representations of *fa'asamoa*, expressions of individual desires and actions are not introduced by new churches, but are also manifested in common Samoan concepts of personhood. As noted in chapter 3, a tension between individual rights and communal control is also manifested in the dual system of governance with village level governance stressing communal control and subordination of the individual, while central government and national legislation ensure the rights of the individual in concordance with international conventions of human rights. Rather than introducing radically new concepts, the establishment of new churches thus interacts with ongoing processes of economic, social and political change and might be analysed as a different language of expressing ambiguities

and potential conflicts existing outside the context of religious beliefs and church establishments.

Thirdly, I have argued that the seemingly oppositional attitudes towards tradition expressed by members of the new churches are not a matter of complete rejection, but a reprioritisation of values. Elements and ideals of tradition and *fa'asamoa* are thus incorporated into a value hierarchy placing greater emphasis on individual salvation. Members of new churches continued to participate in some traditional practices, and also expressed pride in *fa'asamoa* as long as it did not impede on the more important goals of expansions and proselytising. According to core members of the new churches, the tsunami had been a sign to prioritise individual salvation over tradition, the expectations of a rapidly approaching Second Coming rendering tradition and culture unimportant. Members of new churches were thus using eschatological interpretations of the tsunami as arguments that tradition and *fa'asamoa* was loosing importance and salvation and evangelizing should be prioritised.

The disaster thus both facilitated significant change in social, economic and traditional life of the tsunami affected population and was a continuation of ongoing processes of change and a new way of expressing inherent ambiguities and widely felt dissatisfactions with biblical interpretations and pastoral authority as legitimising foundation.

Posing the topic of social change in disaster and disaster aftermath as an empirical question, the conclusion of my analysis might be, as ambiguously stated by Susanna Hoffman: "no, but also decidedly yes" (Hoffman 1999b:319). The theoretical point of departure for my analysis has been that disasters arise in the conjuncture of human society and a potentially destructive agent. Disasters are thus not in themselves agents of change. Rather, people respond to disasters based on everyday concerns, existing cosmologies and individual and group strategies, acting upon their interpretations of the disaster and using it to bring about or oppose social change. My analysis thus underlines the importance of analysing disaster as a process deeply interconnected and inseparable from so-called everyday life and ongoing processes of change and continuity.

8.3 The role and application of anthropology in disaster research

Prior to and during my fieldwork, I have moved from the diplomatic and bureaucratic world of development and humanitarian relief through national level planning and implementation

of recovery programmes to village level daily life and local experiences of a disaster. This thesis has focused on the latter, but my experiences in the world of bureaucracy in Geneva and the national level implementation at the UNDP in Apia have been important in giving me a sense of "the bigger picture" of disaster recovery. Post tsunami Levao and Salesi certainly are a long way from the marble floors and stiff bureaucracy of the United Nations in Geneva. As noted in chapter 2, however, disasters are both highly localized and globalized phenomena and disaster relief and recovery are likely to bring together worlds of bureaucracy and policy with the reality of humanitarian needs and suffering in very urgent ways.

Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman (2002) argues that anthropology is ideally suited to understand the processes of disasters, vulnerability and recovery holistically and that a disaster situation gives important insight into classical anthropological fields of interests such as adaptation to the environment, structures of power and inequalities, constructions and conceptions of morality, values and cosmologies (Hoffman & Oliver-Smith 2002:6-12). This thesis has also argued that disasters form interesting subjects of anthropological attention in exploring how people make sense of the unexpected from already existing cultural categories and act upon these understandings in negotiations of social change.

Paraphrasing the analytical position of Anderskov (2004) we ought to perhaps ask not only what disasters do for anthropology but also what anthropology can do for disaster. One major contribution to disaster studies from the field of anthropology is arguably the methodology of ethnographic fieldwork and the sensitivity to local understandings and social dynamics in disaster situations. With its long term field presence and in-depth understanding of both local contexts and wider national and international interconnections, anthropology is well suited to encompass the complexities and multivocality of disasters, vulnerability and reconstruction (Hoffman & Oliver-Smith 1999:10-14).

Hoffman & Oliver-Smith take the argument one step further, stating that not only is anthropology ideally suited to study disasters, anthropologists also have an obligation to move from theory and methodology to practice and become actively engaged by mitigating suffering, advise and facilitate culturally appropriate aid distribution and recovery, ensuring communication and understanding between affected populations and aid agencies and prevent rebuilding inequality and vulnerability in reconstruction. Ensuring dialogue between theory and practice is extraordinarily important in disaster situations, making holistic and in-depth

socio-cultural data available to practitioners, not only in disaster aftermaths but also in reducing vulnerabilities to prevent or reduce impact of future disasters (ibid:16).

Concepts of vulnerability reduction and resilience are central to humanitarian and relief organisations working in disaster relief and recovery on both the international level of policy and bureaucracy and national levels of project implementation. My empirical data illustrates that members of the tsunami affected population actively responded to and acted upon their own interpretations of the tsunami in reducing vulnerabilities within religious understandings of disasters and disaster impact. Conceptions of being ready and prepared for future disasters were understood within religious interpretations, with my informants aiming at reducing vulnerability through salvation, evangelizing and following biblical rules. My informants thus worked actively to reduce vulnerabilities to future disasters, albeit in rather different forms and expressions than those emphasised in humanitarian agencies.

8.3.1 Bridging the worlds of development and faith

According to development scholars Katherine Marshall and Marissa van Saanen, the last years have seen a shift towards more cooperation between faith based groups and international development organisations such as UN agencies and the World Bank (Marshall & Saanen 2007:1-5). In both Europe and the USA, political statements have in recent years underlined the need to bridge the worlds of faith and development (see for example Clinton 2006, Solheim 2010). In Samoa, where churches and pastors hold prominent positions in village life and religious beliefs and organisation penetrates both economic, social and cultural spheres, the coordination of development programmes with faith based communities and concerns is perhaps particularly important.

My study thus enters into a wider debate of how to approach religious beliefs and organisation in development. From my personal experience with both the UN in Geneva and at the UNDP Samoa, religious faith was often articulated as problematic hindrances to be fought and overcome, with especially non-Samoan members of the Early Recovery team stating that Christianity posed a problem for successful development, because people were prioritising church donations rather than improving living conditions and investing in the their children's future and education.

Interestingly, a similar argument was made by my informants of the new churches, stating that people should "*develop their own families*" rather than burdening themselves with church and *fa'alavelave.* It thus seems that development agencies and new churches expressed similar purposes, applying different strategies for similar goals. From my experience, the arguments and approaches of the latter clearly seemed most successful, basing social and economic critique as well as discourse of change on biblical and pastoral authority as a powerful and legitimizing foundation.

Finally, my empirical data has indicated that religious understandings of disasters does not necessarily preclude taking other measures based on non-religious scientific understandings of disasters and vulnerability, such as relocation, more in line with approaches to vulnerability reduction in humanitarian relief and development. I therefore suggest that religious interpretations of disasters and vulnerability should not be approached as a potential threat to recovery and development, something to be fought and overcome by humanitarian agencies. Rather, religious agents of change and development agencies seem to share many of the same goals and might benefit greatly from cooperation.

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