

***FAASINOMAGA* OF AN
ADOPTED CHILD FROM THE
PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE**

A Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the Malua Theological College

In Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Theology

by

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ABSTRACT

This Thesis is a study about the experiences and the perspectives of adoptive parents, children and Ministers regarding the topic: '*Faasinomaga* of an adopted child from a Pastoral Perspective'. The qualitative method used for this study will provide answers or at the very least, provide inspiration for adopted children and adoptive and biological parents facing uncertainty around their identities. I feel that adoption has had a negative impact on my life psychologically, because it made me questioned a lot of things. Progressing with this paper was a challenge for me personally, especially because it required me to share and expose what I felt would never be heard, nor worthy to be recognised. However, having talked to different people with their unique stories on this issue, it has encouraged and given me the strength to proceed, knowing that there is a possibility that this paper could help a Samoan adopted child struggling to find his/her true identity. Thus empowering adopted children (like myself) to realise that there is a *Faasinomaga* in the *FaaSamoa* and in the family of God for us all.

DECLARATION

I declare that this work has not used without due acknowledgment of any material that has been previously submitted for a degree or diploma in another institution. I also declare that the work has not used any material, heard or read, without proper acknowledgment of the source.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my two beloved grandmothers, Fiapapalagi Kupa and Seleni

Laei who have passed away. They have been my inspiration in life.

To my two Dearest mothers, Liufiso Tevaga and Me Tuala, and my parents in law, Rev

Niulala Kupa and Loreta Kupa whom I dearly love, this is dedicated to you all for the

continuous support for me.

To my beloved CCCS parishes in Hamilton and Palmerston North New Zealand, EFKS

Tulaele, Tafua Tai and Patamea You are my Jerusalem where I was born and bred and

nurtured in the Word of God.

To my wife, Naitosara Tevaga and our children, Nasha, Niulala, Tiana and Katrinalma.

Thank you for your prayers which has encouraged me to complete this task.

God bless.

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“I lift up my eyes to the hills-- from where will my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” (Psalms 121:1-2) Glory be unto you Lord now and forever.

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May God bless you all and Malua Theological College.

List of Abbreviations

A	–	Adoptees Respondents (numbered 1, 2, 3, 4)
AP1	–	Adoptive Parents Respondents (numbered 1, 2, 3, 4)
BP1	–	Biological Parents (numbered 1, 2, 3)
CCCS	–	Congregational Christian Church Samoa
Dr	-	Doctorates in different fields such as Theology
EFKS	-	Ekalesia Faapotopotoga Kerisiano Samoa
Rev	–	Reverend

Introduction

Who am I? I was born on the 1st March 1977, in the village of Samalaeulu at Savaii. I was the third eldest out of twelve siblings. Two months later, I was adopted by my biological mother's elder brother and wife who I identify today as my 'parents', who have no other children. Life was normal as a child, growing up alone without any brothers or sisters, yet this context did not matter much as I had the luxury of getting what I wanted most of the time and the world seemed to revolve around me. Such a life was possible because of the love that my adoptive parents had for me. They were really committed in raising me, ensuring that I was healthy, well educated, and not starved of anything to eat. My adoptive parents even sent me to Australia for six years for better education which shows their determination to find a better future for me.

Research Problem: Issue

However, all this love didn't stop me from having a feeling about who I really am? As I came to know my biological family, I was living in a way in two different families (worlds). I didn't really know who I was or where I belonged. Because just as much as I love my adopted parents, yet it is also natural that I have feelings for my biological family; and it is something that no one can take away. I think it was very hard for me because of how I found out very late in life that I was adopted, which was hard to take. It led me to somehow question everything in life about where I belonged and who I was as a person. I felt drowned and lost in two separate families (worlds). I questioned why I was not told earlier in life about my adoption.

My curiosity started at my adopted mother's extended family gatherings. I sensed myself being treated as an outsider who did not fully belong there, especially my cousins who mocked me as not being their real cousins. It was the same feeling when I

was with my adoptive father's extended family, they also tended to look at me and labelled me as an outcast. I was finally told about my biological family when I was fifteen, but it created more problems. My biological brothers and sisters tended to treat me differently, and for that, I blame the timing of them revealing my true biological family. To me it was too late. As a result, the only place I felt comfortable was with my adoptive parents. It raises questions about my *faasinomaga*¹ or identity as an adopted child and where I belonged.

Research Question(s), Significance and Aim

This thesis focuses on the question – What is the *faasinomaga* for an adopted child from a pastoral perspective? The research question opens up the discussion on the cultural identity of an adopted child in the *faaSamoa*², and the theological discussion of adoption and the family of God. Identifying the *faasinomaga* and theological identity of an adopted child in the *faaSamoa* and family of God, will encourage other adopted children who are going through the experiences I went through. It is to encourage them to remain hopeful and know that they have a special and precious place/belonging in the *faaSamoa* and Family of God.

The other important aspect of this topic is that we must also consider and recognise the love of adoptive parents. After interviewing and having a long conversation with my mother regarding her views on this topic, she was very emotional, maybe it was the fact that she finally heard me talk about this sensitive issue (adoption).

¹ *Fa'asinomaga* is a Samoān personal identity. It is who you are as a Sāmoan. It includes your parents, family, village, district, land, chief title, your parent's families and their (parents) villages plus other elements that determine who a *tagata* is as a Sāmoan. It is the Sāmoan traditional identity that illustrates and shows who an individual is, where they belong and all her/his *faiā*, more will be discussed on this concept in Chapter 2

² *FaaSamoa* is simply the Samoan way of life or way of living. It includes the Samoan values and responsibilities as a community to take care of one another. More will be said about the *FaaSamoa* in Chapter 2

My mother could not bear a child, which is why they adopted me when I was a baby. As our lives went on, we were happy as a family, and I could not ask for anything more except that I had no brother or sister. But I have seen and felt the love and care which they have provided and given me as their child. It is this love that has gotten me to where I am today, the safe environment and the effort that they put in raising me as their only child.

However, it was the outside pressure of finding where I belonged in the extended family as abovementioned that motivated me to claim or seek the truth about the Samoan identity of an adopted child. From experience and theological learning, I believe there is a *faasinomaga* of an adopted child in the church and the *faaSamoa* from the pastoral perspective. The aim of this thesis, therefore, is to explore the identity of adopted children in God's family and the *faaSamoa*; and to appreciate the nurturing love and compassionate relationship and care that is created in adoption.

Methodology/Method and Chapter Outline

The Methodology of the paper will primarily utilize qualitative in-depth information from interviews. Catherine Dawson in her book, *Introduction to Research Methods: A practical guide for anyone undertaking a research project*, simplifies 'qualitative research' as focusing on an in-depth search for quality information using a small sample' (2009, 14 -15). This thesis uses material from relevant scholar's articles, journals, government reports and books to support and provide evidence for this work. The method I used for interviewing was semi-structured interviews. This is where open ended questions were asked with the assistance of guiding questions based on the abovementioned Research Question.

Due to the nature of this undertaking and its target group, the study used a 'quota sampling method', which is a 'purposive sampling method' that is used to select the

right cluster of the target group that is available and relevant to the purpose of the research. A sample taken from this method is not representative, but the best ones available that is appropriate for the study are chosen and used by the survey (May 1993, 71). I interviewed 7 parents who were involved in the adoption processes: 3 were biological parents and 4 were adoptive parents. I was planning to interview 10 adopted children. However, due to circumstances beyond my control, I was only able to interview 4 adoptees. Due to confidentiality purposes, Codes are used to identify the respondents instead of their names in Chapter One. I was also able to interview some pastors (including Elders) and wives to get the pastoral perspective on the issue. Tui-Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi³ was also interviewed due to his expertise on the Samoan culture. A senior member from the Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration, Mrs Tofilau Leavai⁴, was interviewed to get legal opinion on the adoption process in *Samoa*.

Chapter One starts with a brief literature review and background information on what adoption is and some key definitions and concepts that will be used throughout the paper. Chapter One also focusses on the experiences of those involved in adoption such as parents and the adoptees. Chapter Two focuses on adoption from the *FaaSamoa* or the Samoan way of living and cultural perspective. Chapter Three focuses on the theological discussion and reflection of adoption, and then the final part of the paper is the conclusion and way forward.

³ Efi is a former Head of State and Prime Minister of Samoa, who has produced a number of publications on the Samoan culture.

⁴ Mrs Leavai is the Assistant Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Justice, Court and Administration of Samoa. She was also a Senior Police Officers with a lot of expertise on laws.

Chapter 1

Literature review on adoption and analysis of interview responses/ finding

Introduction

Chapter One starts with a brief literature review and background information on what adoption is? and some key definitions and concepts that will be used throughout the paper. The last part of the chapter looks at the experiences of those involved in the adoption such as parents and adoptees.

1.1 Brief Literature Review and Background Information

What is adoption?

Adoption is a topic that has been examined, written about and studied by many secular and theological writers. In general, the word ‘adoption’ continues to have underlying negativity associated with it even though many adopted people have positive experiences and are even considered to be resilient. It is no wonder why many of the studies I explored seem to explain the negative impact of adoption. Most of these negative perspectives are based on the thinking that adoption is always associated with the orphan’s crisis, where children are abandoned by their parents. There is minimal literature that exists in relation to adoption practices promoting healthy adjustment and a sense of well-being in adopted children - which is the emphasis of this thesis.

Hence, presented herein are relevant works on adoption that were used to present and produce this study. Although there are many given definitions of adoption, many scholars including Kathy P. Zamostny of the University of Maryland simplifies it as, ‘the act of taking in another human as one’s own’. It is the practice of taking responsibility for a person and his/her well-being (Zamostny 2003, 1 – 5). This means

accepting the joys and hardships associated with setting aside one's own interests in order to extend a heart full of love in a life-long dedication to the adopted child.

Zamostny's argument is in line with Lisa Marie Heath's view that adoption is natural,

There is nothing odd about taking somebody else's child into a person's home and bringing it up as your own. This has been done for thousands of years. Moses was the first adoption we have on record. He was rescued from the Nile River by a princess who raised him like her own (2012, 5).

Looking at a more holistic perspective, Elizabeth Cole and Kathryn Donely refers to adoption as a "...personal act, a legal process, or a social service" (Cole & Donely, 1990). To Cole and Donely, it is a 'personal act' as it involves three parties coming together into a collective agreement: the adoptee, the adoptive family and the biological family. It is a 'legal process' as it involves following domestic laws that govern the building of such process. Lastly, it is a 'social service' as it requires setting up adequate environment for not only the adopted child but also for the adoptive family and the biological family (Cole and Donely 1990).

From the above discussion, we could say that adoption is the legal process by which a child becomes the child of persons other than his/her natural or biological parents. When a child is legally adopted, the adopters become the child's parent(s). The biological parents are no longer considered to be the child's parents and they are permanently deprived of their parental rights. Most scholars accepted the definition given by the APA Dictionary of Psychology, which "is the legal process by which an infant or child is permanently placed with a family other than his or her own by biology" (2007, p. 22).

There are so many kinds of adoption¹, but due to the scope of this paper, I will focus on the above definitions and the adoption process that is the focus of this thesis, that is 'related adoption'. 'Related adoption' involves children who are related to the adoptive parents as labeled by Kathy S. Stolley (1993, 28). Related adoption is simply adoption done within the circle of the family. Related adoption is something that is very common in the Samoan context according to Seumanutafa and Corrin in their study of adoption in Samoa that I will be discussing later (2019, 100). Therefore, the above definitions and implications of adoptions will be used throughout this thesis as we go along. There is also another component to adoption which is when you choose to legally adopt or do it through the informal way. Legal adoption is with three agencies as explained previously with the involvement of the adopted child, the biological parents and the adoptive parents in a legal process. Then there is informal or related adoption where only the biological and adopted parents are involved as they are related and they do not go through the Court system. Let us look at the adoption processes in the Samoan framework.

Background Information

The Samoa Infants Ordinance 1961 states that if a child is the subject of adoption, the consent of both parents is required by law even if the parents are unmarried. In instances where the whereabouts of the father is not known, or in exceptional cases, consent may be dispensed with by the court. Infants Ordinance 1961 Part II Adoption of Infants – (1) a child may be adopted by any person (whether domiciled in Samoa or not) subject to provisions of this Ordinance. A child may be adopted by a couple or may be adopted by one person. The Court must be satisfied that the person(s) adopting the child

¹ There is private adoption, public adoption, closed adoption and open adoption plus other kind of adoption processes.

is of good repute (Child Protection Bill, 2013). The above sections guide local adoptions in Samoa.

According to the Senior officer of the Ministry of Justice and Court Administration Mrs. Tofilau S. Leavai², adoption is handled by the Family Court, and is usually for children ages between 6 to 15 years old (Interviewed by Author 2020). Leavai added that the official transfer through the court system allowed all the parental rights that a biological parent has to a child to the adoptive parents. These include the responsibility for the care and supervision of the child, including nurturing and training, physical and emotional health, and financial support. These are also implications covered under the Convention on the Rights of the Child that Samoa (known as CRC) ratified in 1992 (Ministry of Women, 2007).

As mentioned above by Heath, adoption is natural. Leavai expressed a similar observation that adoptions within extended family groupings are common in Samoa. This is in line with ‘Related adoption’ as put forth by Stolley. The culture of the *aiga* where a child may choose with whom she/he would like to stay, leads to many “informal” adoptions, where the child merely taking the last name of the family she/he is living with. This informal adoption is very common in Samoa according to Leavai, the problem is that it is undocumented. Leavai’s comment is also reflected in the case study conducted by Seumanutafa and Corrin on adoption in Samoa. They found out that there is a lot of customary or informal adoption in Samoa that is not documented (2019, 195). Adoption in the context of *aiga* is part of the Samoan cultural way of living that will be discussed in the next chapter. Therefore, it is clear in the context of Samoa that

² Mrs Leavai is the Assistant Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Justice, Court and Administration of Samoa. She was also a Senior Police Officers with a lot of expertise on laws.

legal adoption, related adoption and informal adoption do exist. It is the reality of how adoption is done in the context of Samoa.

In relation to the statistics, Leavai added that the Adoption rate has risen over the years in Samoa, records from the Ministry of Justice and Courts Administration demonstrates this as illustrated in Figure 1. There are various reasons why parents file legal applications for adoptions in Samoa – some include broken marriages/divorce/single parent, migration faults and poverty. Majority of the applications are local adoptions where parents are both residences of Samoa. As such, this paper focuses on those adopted through the informal, customary and related adoption as defined and explained above.

Figure 1 Number of children adopted in Samoa by Samoan under state law

Local applicants	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Jan 2018
Applications filed	74	81	59	93	245	40	2
Applications granted	74	81	59	93	245	40	2

Children's Protection under the Law

On the national level, Samoa's Constitution provides sufficient protection for children. It guarantees equality of all before the law in Section 15 which declares that, "All persons are equal before the law and entitled to equal protection under the law" (Office of the Legislative Assembly 2008), including children regardless if they are adopted or biological. The Samoan government through the Ministry of Women and Community Development ratified the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, commonly known as the CRC in 1994 (Secretariat of the Pacific Community 2007, 5). The Convention looks at ways to ensure children are well looked after and enjoyed the necessities of life such as education and other basic needs regardless of their statuses.

The Government also provides Policies and Action Frameworks for Children's needs on a multi sector approach and these include the 'Samoa National Policy for Children 2010 - 2015' under the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development, and 'Education for All Policy' under the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture to name a few (Office of the Legislative Assembly 2008).

1.2 Case Study - Interviews and Responses Analysis: Themes from feedbacks

Due to the confidentiality and sensitivity of adoption in our Samoan context discussed, I used the 'quota sampling method', which is a 'purposive sampling method' that is used to select the right cluster of the target group that is available and relevant for the purpose of the research. A sample taken from this method is not representative, but the best available at the time and appropriate for the study are chosen and used (May 1993, 71). I was able to interview 7 parents who were involved in adoption process, 3 are biological parents and 4 are adopted parents. I was planning to interview 10 adoptees, however, due to some uncontrollable circumstances, I was only able to interview 4 adoptees. Due to confidentiality purposes, Codes are used to identify the respondents instead of their names.

Parents Respondents

All adoptive parent respondents interviewed, acknowledged that they know who they were dealing with in the adoption process. In other words they were related to the adoptees and their biological parents. Only one adoptive parent who is a Reverend stated that they adopted a child from their village, which to him, they are culturally related. This is in line with what Leavai and Seumantufa stated above, that informal

adoption is common in Samoa. Specifically that it is culturally appropriate within the *FaaSamoa* and is between related family members (related adoption).

Biological Parents

The 3 biological parents (referred to as BP1, BP2, BP3) offered different reasons as to why they gave their children away. BP1 stated that it was because she was single at the time and was not able to look after her baby, so she gave her child to her aunty who is now the adoptive mother. The other two biological parents, BP2 and BP3, said that they gave their children away to help relatives. BP2 gave away her child to a relative that was not able to have a child. BP3 gave away his son to a relative who had only daughters but no son. To BP3, it was one of the hardest things he had done in his life, but he recognised that it was God's call and plan as it would help his brother in law. BP3 believes that his son is treated well and even spoilt by his adoptive parents and is happy to see the kindness and love his departed child now enjoys.

The three biological parents all shared their joy of seeing their children living a happy life being cared for by their adoptive parents with love and affection. This is also the affection I got from my adoptive parents. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, all three biological parents' interviewees acknowledge that they are still in contact with the adoptive parents. It is one of the common features from all biological parents that their children are still within the circle of their *aiga*.

Interestingly enough, all biological parents believe that it is not right to tell their children that they are their real parents; timing for this is especially important. They believe that this is not showing true love. They explained that it was easy for them to offer their children to their adoptive parents, as they were their relatives and really needed them. BP1 believes that this was done in the best interests of her child, and she

does not regret this. The other two biological parents believe that there are times when they miss their children, but not telling them is the best option for their wellbeing.

Adoptive Parents

The four adoptive parents (referred to as AP1, AP2, AP3, and AP4) have different reasons for adopting. All adoptive parents used the informal and related adoption, not the legal adoption. AP1 adopted her niece's child, as her niece (the biological mother) had four children and was not able to look after them financially. AP1 stated that her niece willingly allowed the adoption as a way for a better future for her child. AP1 did not let the adoptee know about the adoption, but the adoptee knew about it early from other cousins as they all live in the extended family. It was not a problem however, as they are still living happily together.

AP2 is a Reverend, and he adopted the child from a church member who was a single mother and had problems when she was pregnant (as a teenager). The adoptee was told about her being adopted when she was old enough to understand life. AP2 believes that it was the right thing as most church members knew about the situation. The biological mother is still in contact with her child but there is a clear understanding that the child enjoys her life and the love of her adoptive family.

AP3 and AP4 adopted children as they could not have children due to health reasons. They adopted children within the circle of their extended families as they are their *aiga*³. Both adoptive parents expressed the joy and excitement of the process, it was also emotional. AP3 acknowledges that they discussed the issue with the biological parents before the child was born. This was emotional, they prayed for the child and even visited and offered support to the biological parents during pregnancy and

³ *Aiga* Is family, this will be discussed in detail in chapter 2

delivery. AP4 stated that the biological parents were happy when they first discussed the process as they had eight children. All adoptive parents stated that adoption took place at a very young age and was important in building up the initial relationship.

Looking at the above information, it seems that love and *aiga* is at the centre of adoption from the perspectives of adoptive and biological parents. This maybe the case due to the use of cultural informal adoption or related adoption. There is also the issue of not letting the child know about the process, as it will hinder the love that founded the adoption process. However, the nature of the Samoan *aiga* which is communal and socially relational, always stirred up curiosity and hindered this secrecy. Let us turn to the adoptees' respondents.

Adoptees Respondents

The 4 adoptees (A1 A2 A3 and A4) were all born in Samoa. A1 however was adopted and raised in New Zealand, the other 3 adoptees were adopted and raised in Samoa. A1 expressed that he still had questions in his mind: Why was he adopted? Why was he not told? A1 was told of his adoption by his biological sister. He was shocked at first, but started to think back and see why things happened the way it did. The blame by A1 was both on the biological and adoptive parents. A1 questioned why he was given away, and why his adoptive parents never said anything about it. During the interview A1 said that he was in the process of ironing these differences, as it was not easy, as he is still processing through his confusion. A1 however expressed his gratitude by the love shown by his adoptive parents in raising him. There was a lot of sacrifice for him as he also moved to New Zealand with his adoptive family. A1 stated that the affection his adoptive parents showed him was much appreciated.

A2 and A3 respondents stated that there are healthy relationships between them and their biological and adoptive parents. They are allowed by their adoptive parents to

spend the weekend with their biological families which excites them and is something they look forward to. Both A2 and A3 expressed that very good understanding between their biological and adoptive families as they are *aiga* in the extended family. A2 said he was told about being adopted at a young age. A3 could not remember when he was made known of the adoption but grew up knowing all along.

A4's case is different. She was adopted in her young age. She was curious of her adoption because of children mocking her during pastor's school. This led her to question her step mother about the issue. Her adoptive parents then talked to her about the issue, together with her adopted siblings. To her, it was very emotional, but accepted it as she really loves her adopted parents as they have done so much for her; and there was never a time they mistreated her.

Looking at the above responses from the adoptees, it highlights the importance of communication between adoptees and their adoptive parents. Is it good to tell the adoptees? When is the right time? Communication, as mentioned in the case of A2 and A3, creates a healthy environment. It highlights the importance of knowing from adoptive parents, rather than being curious and getting told by someone else as Samoan society is openly social in nature. Let us now shift our discussion in light of the Samoan cultural perspective on the identity of an adopted child.

Chapter 2

***Faasinomaga* of an adopted child**

Introduction

The previous chapter looked at the background information and the brief literature review of what adoption is and the many experiences shared by not only the adoptees, adoptive parents but also biological parents. This chapter focusses on the Samoan cultural perspective on an adopted child's identity or *faasinomaga*.

2.1 Faasinomaga

Fa'asinomaga is a Samoan personal identity. It is who you are as a Samoan that Fanaafi Aiono – Le Tagaloa calls it, the 'Samoan worldview' of a *tagata* or 'person' in the *faaSamoa* (2003, 7). The word "worldview" is defined by Albert M Wolter as "...comprehensive framework of one's basic belief about things" (2005, 2). Le Tagaloa defines the 'Samoan worldview' as how the Samoans see their context's sets of beliefs and ways of living through the lens of their identity as Samoans. It answers questions like, "...Where do I come from? Why am I here? Who am I?" (Le Tagaloa 2003, 7). As mentioned in the introductory part of this thesis, these were some of the questions I faced during my down time in the early stages of my adopted life. This was also the case of A1 as discussed in the previous chapter, where confusion arose about who he was, and why he was treated like that. To avoid any confusion on *Faasinomaga* and *FaaSamoa*, Malama Meleisea defines *FaaSamoa* as "In the manner of the Sāmoans; according to Sāmoan customs and tradition" (1987, vii).

The basis of the *FaaSamoa* is that every *tagata* has a *fa'asinomaga* or genealogical and cultural identity in Samoa. A child belongs to a family, chief title, land, genealogy, village, traditional districts plus other elements that determine who a

tagata is as a Samoan. It is the Samoan traditional identity that illustrates and shows who an individual is, where he/she belongs and all her/his relationships as explained by Le Tagaloa. Therefore, a *tagata* has many connections to lands, different villages, districts and even titles. These signify that a *tagata* is a communal being with numerous connections and traditional relationships not only in immediate and extended family, land and titles, but also in the village, district and the society as a whole. As I mentioned above, one of the issues I faced was with the extended *aiga* of my adoptive parents. All of the adoptions discussed in my case study in Chapter One are related adoption.

Tolu Muliaina in his dissertation argues that *faasinomaga* is more than just an identity, but a gift and a responsibility (2017, 130-135). Muliaina sees *faasinomaga* as the binding force that keeps the *faaSamoa* intact. Everyone is responsible for everyone, as the *faaSamoa* upholds communal living where one is responsible for one another; regardless of one's gender/status or sex (Muliaina 2017). Therefore, all is recognised in the *FaaSamoa* as important, and their belonging and identity is the responsibility of all; thus, including adopted children.

Aiga and the tagata (family and individual)

I am now using the last name of my adopted family. For me, my last name points me to my *aiga*, its lands, genealogy and everything that my last name is part of. The *aiga* is the most important unit in the Samoan society. It is where genealogy or *gafa* is kept and nurtured. The *aiga* is also the unit that formed up the village and society. The *aiga potopoto* or extended family is the most-well recognised and important family setting in Samoa. It is where family lands and chief titles are discussed and finalised.

The extended family is the context where most informal and related adoptions are made. David Lui refers to *āiga* as the "...unit of society...not the individual" (2003, 3). The basic form of *āiga* is the nuclear family, consisting of parents and children, with the

father being a *matai* or chief. Societal life in Sāmoa as outlined above is communal and the most common form of family is the extended family or *āiga-potopoto*.

As highlighted, the *aiga* is the nurturing ground where identity is taught, learned, valued, honoured, maintained and sustained. The *tagata-fou* translated as ‘new member or individual’ is the Samoan name given to a new born child; regardless if they are a biological child or an adopted child. So I will use the term *tagata fou* as a reference to the adopted child, as they are new into the family; regardless of whether they were adopted at a young age or not. This is in line with Unasa Vaa’s argument that “...non-localized cognatic corporation headed by a *matai* and consisting of people born or adopted into his household” (2009, 241).

A *tagata-fou* is placed in a very special position within the context of the *aiga*. There is a common saying “O au o mātua fanau”, literally translated as ‘Children are dear to or treasured by their parents’. As argued above, every *tagata-fou* has a *fa’asinomaga* or genealogical and cultural identity in Sāmoa, regardless of how they were conceived (Government of Samoa 2006, 8). These understandings are hereditary ties that is the basis for the Sāmoan proverb: *E tele atu a’a o le tagata i a’a o le laau*, which is literally translated as “A ‘person has many relationships and connections than the roots of a tree’. They signify that a person is a communal being with numerous connections and traditional relationships not only in the immediate and extended family, land and titles, but also in the village, district and the society as a whole.

Heirs or Suli and Vaetama

Suli or heir is very important in discussing the *faassinomaga*. Unasa L F Vaa defines *suli* as,

A *suli* is an heir of a kinship group which owns one or several chiefly titles in a village. A *suli* is one whose rights to title, land, property, honours and so forth accrue by reason of birth, or adoption or through service (2009, 241).

According to TuiAtua Tupua Tamasese Efi¹, in the Samoan *aiga*, there are four kinds of *suli* or heir that a *tagata* is categorised and ranked² -

- (1) *Suli-tupolata* who are the *suli-moni* or true heirs,
- (2) *sulisaota* or the *sulitamafai* the adopted heirs,
- (3) *sulitupolo* or the in-laws and
- (4) *sulitupea* through friendship and service.

Vaa uses different terms, like those who are *suli* by virtue of birth are known as *suli tau toto*, *tau aano*, *tau ivi*, they have the strongest rights to a family's title/s, land and property; then those *suli* who are adopted or *tama fai*. Then finally, those who acquired a family's title through service are *suli tautua*, often of a long-term nature and often because of the lack of natural-born heirs (2009, 241).

According to TuiAtua Tupua Tamasese in our interview, *Sulimoni* and *Suisaota* are the ones entitled to chief titles, while the other two heirs, namely the *Sulitupea* and *Sulitupolo* only participate in discussions. This is in line with Vaa's argument above. Therefore adopted heirs or *tamafai* are very important and are ranked very highly in the setting of the *aiga* and in the *faa-Samoa*. They are recognised in deliberation and discussions. They are entitled to chief titles and all that are connected to the land and the *faasinmoga*.

Vaetama

*Vaetama*³ is often referred to as adoption. However, it is also used interchangeably with *tamafai* as highlighted by Vaa. According to Lalotoa

¹ Personal Interview at Efi's residence on 20th March 2020.

² Efi was a former Prime Minister and former Head of State of Samoa, and is famous for his Samoan wisdom and many Samoan publications.

³ *Vae* in Samoan could be applied to foot or leg, but could also be used as the act of kicking or transferring something by foot. *Tama* is a general word given for a boy, but in the *Vaetama* usage, it is referred to a child (boy or girl).

Seumanutafa “...a child not raised by the biological parents is ‘*tama fai*’, which literally translated as ‘child made’, and the process is called ‘*vae tama*’ which translates, as ‘separating the child’” (2019, 95). In the Samoan setting, reference to *tamafai* is commonly understood to mean that the child’s parents are not the biological parents of the child (Seumanutafa 2019, 94-95) but are related to the natural mother or father of the child. Turner according to Unasa Vaa recorded the process of *Vaetama* as a ceremonial exchange, to replenish human resources usually in the event of the failure of a *suli* to produce heirs, or to lay a claim to higher nobility. Such reasons for adoption are also part of the case study respondents as presented in Chapter One, where AP3 (Adopted Parent 3) provided support financially during pregnancy and delivery. This is in line with the Samoan practice of ‘*nunu fanau*’⁴ where traditional gifts and food are presented to the village and district by the parents and their families in appreciation of the new additional life or *tagata fou* for not only the family, but also the village and district (Tamasese 2006, 1 – 3).

Turner according to Vaa, also recounts a typical example in early-contact Samoa. A husband would give away his child for adoption by his sister in return for property (*oloa*). The adopted child was viewed as *toga* or the Samoan sacred fine mat and was, to the adoptive family, a way of getting native property or *toga*. That *toga* would then continue to flow to that family from the parents of the child. Conversely, the adopted child was to its biological parents a source of obtaining property from the adoptive parents from the time of the adoption for as long as the child lives (2009, 241-242).

Casting *Vaetama* in light of the *faasinomaga* discussion above, it is valid to say that *vaetama* is a practice made for the convenience of the whole *aiga* and community,

⁴ *Nunu* means to chew slowly without opening the mouth, and *fanau* is children. Therefore, its food for those praying for the wellbeing of the mother and the baby. It is to thank the prayers of the village which enables the birth of the *tagata-fou*.

as one does not operate without the rest of the *aiga*. Everyone has a duty to each other as all are communal and relational beings with the environment, and what one does must benefit the *aiga potopoto* and village.

The overall discussion above highlights the *faasinomaga* of the adopted child in the Samoan cultural context as a *tamafai* or adopted heir; thus, entitling them to land, titles and other heir entitlement as previously mentioned. The adopted child through *vaetama* solidifies family ties and extends the *faasinomaga* of families. The *tagatafou's* identity is upheld by not only the family but also the village and community through communal and relational living. Adoption therefore is *vaetama* and *tamafai*, although *vaetama* can be the process, while the caring of an adopted child and being an heir is known as *tamafai*. As presented in the Case Study in Chapter One, love and family ties are the two important aspects of customary or related adoption. Let us now look at the theological implications of an adopted child.

Chapter 3

Theological and Pastoral Perspective on God's family

Introduction

This chapter looks at the theological and pastoral perspectives and implications of adoption. The discussion from Chapter One and Chapter Two will be woven together with the theological discussion to highlight adoption from a pastoral perspective that includes the ministry of the Congregational Christian Church of Samoa (CCCS).

Inclusive Church for all: Christ the Head and the Church as His Body

The CCCS constitution defines the church as the body of Christ as set out in 1 Corinthians 12:27 “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it”. With Christ as the Head, and the Church as His Body that is made up of different members (2011, 5). In realising the above definition of CCCS ministry as the body of Christ, the CCCS constitution outlines two main important tasks and missions of the church in the world,

There are two aspects of this important work of the Church in the world: (1) The Church represents God to men in its testimony and loving service to people, and may all its words and actions be a way to draw God's Holy Love to people. (2) The Church also represents the world before God through its prayers of confession, intercession and thanksgiving (2011, 9 – 10).

The above section of the constitution mandates CCCS to ensure that God's love is reflected in the roles and mission of the church. It is akin to the relational love that is upheld by the *aiga* and the community as discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two, where love binds the process of adoption and all the parties involved. Theologically, it is where God's will is embodied by the relational approach that the church shares with one another and within the context of the congregation.

The first part of CCCS's work as mentioned above is about 'service to the people' and may its 'words and actions' reflect God's love. Therefore, it is the role of CCCS as the Body of Christ and Family of God, to ensure that the church services make certain that everyone is able to attend, enter and worship God without barriers, regardless of his/her status and gender; thus, including adopted children.

Tagata-fou in the Family of God

The above role of the CCCS is also supported by its sacrament Baptism. It is where the congregation makes a vow before God that they will train, look after and take full responsibility of the church's children as their own in the Family of God. The congregation's vow according to the CCCS worship book is as follows,

...ua ou folafola atu, ona o le fesoasoani o le Atua, o le a matou tatalo mo leni tamaiti ma ona matua, o le a matoua tauave foi lo matou tiute o le aoao atu ma fesoasoani atu I leni fanau, ina ia tupu ae o ia e fai ma kerisiano ma tagata o le ekalesia (Congregation Christian Church of Samoa 1975, 54).

The congregation's vow can be literally translated as,

...we proclaim that through the guidance of God, we will pray for this child and his/her parent, we will also perform our duties of teaching and assisting this child so that he/she may grow and become a Christian and member of the church' (author's translation) .

As stated above, the vow spells out the obligation of the church to nurture and ensure that all the baptised children become active members regardless of their circumstance. The adopted child in the *faasinomaga* discussion in Chapter Two is referred to as *tagatafou*. A *tagatafou* is honoured as an heir and member of the *aiga* and community that upholds their identity. It is the *aiga*'s responsibility in the *FaaSamoa* to nurture and raise the *tagatafou* to know his/her *faasinomaga*. The church or Body of Christ is the Family of God which is entrusted with the nurturing and raising of the children who are welcomed in the family of God through baptism.

The first meaning of baptism in the CCCS is the door by which we enter the Family of God to be part of the church fellowship. The second meaning as put forth by Saint Paul is to die together with Christ and rise together with Christ. Because of the work of Christ, members arise as new persons in Christ. Hence, this too is the meaning of baptism in the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (CCCS 2011, 14 – 15).

The congregation commits itself in ensuring that the child is involved and included in the church community in all initiatives and developments to become good Christians. The above vow highlights the churches' responsibilities in fulfilling its vow before God, to ensure its committed in bringing everyone in the church regardless of his/her status and health. Thus, the church is mandated to ensure that it attends to the different needs of its members of the church, to ensure they are able to attend worship. (CCCS 2011, 5 – 14).

Ministry

According to Rev Elder Faauuga Matautia, adoption is a gift from God (Interviewed by Author 2019). Elder Matautia explained that adoption is the exchange of God's gift through love and trust that is exchanged by two sets of parents. Elder Matautia simplifies adoption as *fanau tausī*, which literally translated as a cared for child, which is related to *tamafai* as discussed in Chapter Two. Rev Niulala Kupa also points to adoption as the act of love. Rev Kupa said that adoption from his experience happens for many reasons, but the basis of it all is out of love. The success and effectiveness of adoption is determined by how this love is upheld by the parents involved. *Faletua* Merita Tauati points to adoption as a way of helping each other to ensure the growth of families and family ties. It is love and kindness that binds the whole process, and these are the characters of our God.

The above pastoral perspectives seem to highlight love, care and kindness that encompass the process of adoption regardless of the reason behind it. This is in line with the ministry of the CCCS as outlined in the Constitution of the Church. The ministry is the gift of God through our saviour Jesus Christ, given to us for the betterment of the life and service of all members of the Church (CCCS 2011, 9). All members of the Church are given equal opportunity and the freedom to approach God and continue the work of God in the world. As in 1 Peter 2:9-10, encompasses that there is no way nor person can exclude anyone or member of the Church from partaking in the ministry of the church.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10)..

Christocentric Adoption

As discussed above, we are made new persons in Christ who redeemed us from the bondage of sin and took us into the fellowship of the believers in the Church. Our adoption in Christ is a theme that is expounded in the New Testament and its undercurrents are found throughout the entirety of Scripture. This Christocentric adoption is a powerful representation of the gospel, especially in Pauline letters. For instance,

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will (Ephesians 1:4).

According to Russell Moore in his book, *Adoption for Life*, the Jewish Christians demanded to know if the newly confessed followers of Christ, Gentile believers, were really brothers (circumcised); when the tribal fracturing of the Church was most threatened, Paul laid out a key insight into the church's union with Christ that is the

Spirit of adoption. Moore argued that for Paul, adoption isn't simply one more literary image to convey Jesus' presence in the hearts. Moore clarified that it has everything to do with our identity and our inheritance in Christ, with who we are and where we are headed (2009, 24).

Hence, as it is argue throughout this paper, adoption expands relationships, *aiga*, *faasinomaga*, love, care, opportunities and solidifies identities. The concept of adoption as discussed above came straight from the heart of God that emphasized the depth of our relationship with Him, the rights we have as His children and His redemption of us. God's relational act to us who have no inheritance, but are now heirs, *tagata fou*, and called His children through His love and grace centred on the salvation prepared by Jesus Christ. As clear from Ephesians 1:4, God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be adopted through Jesus Christ. Through Him, we have an inheritance and become heirs in God's family. We are justified, given an identity and new life in Christ.

Christocentric of adoption as mentioned in this Chapter is common in Pauline's letters, as in Galatians 4:1-7,

1. What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. 2 The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. 3 So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. 4 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, Abba Father. 7 So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

It clearly states that we have not only been adopted as God's children but that we also receive the inheritance and blessings in being part of God's family through Christ.

We have not only become heirs, but we are also free from slavery and become trustees of God's grace and unconditional love.

Chapter 4

Conclusion and Recommendation

All in all, adoption as discussed is the act of taking in another human as one's own. It is the practice of taking responsibility for a person and his/her well-being. There is legal adoption with three agencies as explained, and there is informal or related adoption where only the biological and adopted parents are involved. Related adoption more in line with the Samoan custom or informal adoption is common in the Samoan context. All interviewees presented in Chapter One used related adoption as it was done in the context of the *aiga*.

The Case Study analysis in Chapter One found out that love and *aiga* are at the centre of adoption in the perspectives of adoptive and biological parents. This may be the case due to the use of cultural informal adoption or related adoption. There is also the issue of timing and when it is the right time to let the child know about being adopted. It is generally believed from the interviewees that telling adopted children at the wrong time will hinder the love that underlines the purpose for the adoption. However, due to the nature of the Samoan *aiga* which is communal and socially relational, secrecy can never be guaranteed. The interview with the adoptees however highlights the importance of communication between adoptees and their adopted parents. Is it good to tell the adoptees? When is the right time? Communication as mentioned in the case of A2 and A3 creates a healthy environment. It highlights the importance of knowing from adoptive parents directly, rather than being curious and getting told by someone else as Samoan society can be very open.

Fa'asinomaga is a Samoan personal identity. The basis of the *FaaSamoa* is that every *tagata* has a *fa'asinomaga* or genealogical and cultural identity in Samoa. A child

belongs to a family, chief title, land, genealogy, village, traditional districts plus other elements that determine who a *tagata* is as a Samoan. Everyone is responsible for everyone, as the *faaSamoa* upholds communal living where one is responsible for one another; regardless of one's gender/status or sex. The *aiga* is the most important unit in the Samoan society. It is where genealogy or *gafa* is kept and nurtured. The *aiga* is also the unit that form-up village and society.

The *tagata-fou* translated as 'new member or individual' is the Samoan name given to a newborn child; regardless if they are a biological child or an adopted child. The *tagatafou* is an heir or *suli*. A *suli* is an heir of a kinship group which owns one or several chiefly titles in a village. A *suli* is one whose rights to title, land, property, honours and so forth is accrued by reason of birth and or adoption. Therefore, adopted heirs or *tamafai* are very important and are ranked very highly in the setting of the *aiga* and in the *faa-Samoa*. They are recognised in deliberation and discussions. They are entitled to chiefly titles and all that are connected to the land and the *faasinomoga*. This was one of the questions raised at the beginning of this thesis, the *faasinomaga* of a *tamafai*. As discussed, an adopted child through *vaetama* solidifies family ties and extends the *faasinomaga* of families. The *tagatafou's* identity is upheld not only by the family but also the village and community through communal and relational living.

In the Church, (Body of Christ) it is though baptism is where the congregation makes a vow before God that they will teach, look after and take full responsibility of the Church's children as their own in the Family of God and as part of their ministry. The first meaning of baptism in the CCCS is the door by which we enter the Family of God to be part of the Church fellowship. The second meaning as put forth by Saint Paul is to die together with Christ and rise together with Him. Love, care and kindness encompasses the process of adoption regardless of the reason behind it. This is in line

with the ministry of the CCCS, which seeks to enhance the quality of life and service of all its church members.

As argued, through faith in the completed work of Christ, we become members of God's family. As discussed, Paul talks of adoption into the family of God that gives us a new status which sets us free from slavery and sin. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be adopted through Jesus Christ as previously argued. Through Jesus we have an inheritance, we become *suli* and *tagatafou* in God's family.

Recommendation

With the conclusion of the paper stated above, it explains that adoption is an act of taking in another human as one's own. Therefore it is a practice of taking responsibility for his/her well-being. These responsibilities include the informing of the adopted child at the right time. Adoptive parents should also ensure that their adopted child or children are happy and not lost between two families.

Communication is a vital part of adoption where we as adoptive parents and adopted children must be open up to share and discuss with each other, rather than trying to keep it as a secret. It is not love when we hide the truth from our children therefore, we must be honest in telling them who they really are. It is better than finding out from someone else. Adoptive parents should have the courage to let their adopted child meet their biological parents and maintain a good and positive relationship. This paper explains and confirms that adopted children do have a *faasinomaga* within the Samoan culture and in the family of God which is the Church. Everyone is an adopted child through Jesus Christ and the salvation he has provided for us all.

Glossary

Aiga	–	Family
Aiga potopoto	–	Extended family
Fa’aSamoa	–	Samoan way of living
Faasinomaga	–	Samoan personal identity
Faletua	–	Wife of the pastor
Fanau fai	–	Child care
Gafa	-	Genealogy
Matai	–	chief
Oloa	-	Property
Suli	–	heir
Suli saota/suli tamafai	–	Adopted heirsheirs
Suli tau toto, tau aano, tau ivi	–	Heirs through blood, flesh and bones
Suli tupea	–	Friendship and service
Suli Tupolo	–	In-laws
Suli tupolata/suli moni	–	true heirs
Tagata fou	–	New member/individual
Tama fai	–	child made
Toga	–	sacred fine mat
Vaetama	–	eparating the child (adopt)

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