Civil Society, Social Capital and Governance:

Liberal Policy Agendas and Indigenous Civil Society: the

Fa'aSamoa as a Case Study

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Abstract

The funding of civil society has become a key aspect of the governance agenda for international aid. This arises out of a number of theories linking civil society to better governance through the leveraging of social capital. These theories find their genesis in a distinctly liberal body of work that has drawn its findings from Western historical experience. In particular, the work of Robert Putnam and many like him in the 1990's draws its inspiration from Alexis d'Tocqueville's observations of democratic life in the early nineteenth century United States. Here, civic associational, according to Tocqueville, played a key part in the vibrant democratic spirit of the USA. Putnam's own findings, on the difference between governance outcomes in Southern and Northern Italy, mirror those of Tocqueville.

Although the formulations of civil society and social capital inherent in this liberal tradition are but one among many theories, they are the ones that have influenced the international donors and the allocation of development assistance money has reflected this. Civil society funding generally goes to ideal types of organisations that most resemble a Western conception of civil society. In particular, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) have proliferated to take advantage of this.

This may well be overlooking many key forms of civil society that already exist in developing countries. A liberal reading of civil society that focuses on the associative values of civil society organisations would miss groups that are characterised more by kin, ethnicity or tribal ties. The fa'asamoa (or 'Samoan way') is an example of just such an institution that may be viewed as too traditional and backward looking by liberal theory, but upon reflection performs many of the key roles ascribed to civil society including as an important provider of social capital. It could be that donors concerned with good governance would do better to further engage with traditional institutions such as the fa'asamoa, than to simply create a new class of civil society, dominated by NGO's over the top of existing social structures.

Keywords: civil society, social capital, good governance, democracy, cultural specificity, fa'asamoa

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Chapter One: Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to critically approach civil society's role in the good governance agenda for international development assistance. The central argument is that behind the good governance agenda for civil society, and its role as a creator of social capital, lie a set of theories that are based on Western thought and historical experience. This becomes problematic when that agenda is brought to the developing world as a supposed panacea for governance ills. The usual realisation of this is further funding for non-governmental organisations (NGO's) in developing countries, but many negative effects of this have been observed. In particular, the stifling of genuine grassroots activity and traditional forms of civil society that do not reflect what Western liberal theory dictates civil society ought to be. The fa'asamoa, or Samoan way, is an example of a form of traditional civil that is overlooked, yet has a lot to offer in terms of values, norms, strong social networks and as a provider of social capital. With this apparent cultural bias, the good governance agenda for civil society may be harming rather than helping the growth of 'social capital' and other perceived advantages for the facilitation of better governance. Therefore, a wider and less value-laden view of civil society needs to become the norm.

1.1 The Rise of Civil Society and the Governance Agenda

Since the early 1990's, international development agencies and aid donors have become increasingly interested in the issue of governance. Most major institutions, whether based in central government or in civil society, attempt to tackle issues of governance as part of their major strategy frameworks. Over the last fifteen years, a large part of that agenda has increasingly been financial support for civil society.¹

It is not a coincidence that governance leaped to the top of the international development agenda in the early 1990's. With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Cold War that had dominated international politics for the past forty years had come to an end. During the Cold War, the interests of international geopolitics dominated development in the so called "third world". National governments held a large amount of

¹ Carothers, T and Ottaway, M (2002) *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., USA, pg 3.

negotiating power with western governments and western government backed donor agencies. Their ability to change sides in the ongoing confrontation meant that they could squeeze concessions out of the richer nations, and accept aid that was beneficial to the government, though not always beneficial to the wider development needs of the country. Western (and Eastern) governments were only too happy to pander to the needs of the current regime in many developing countries by not 'rocking the boat' and questioning the efficacy of these regimes in the field of economic and human development, or try to stamp out the corruption that pervaded many of these regimes, and which only made development efforts all the more difficult. The shift to the governance agenda represented the foreign policy of Western governments "de-linking" from security objectives.²

The privileged position of regimes in the developing world had ended. For the first time there was a general consensus throughout the developed world about how governments and economies should be organised. This has been dubbed the "Washington consensus" although that term is more widely used when describing the apparent 'consensus' in the realm of prescribed economic policy.

This had the effect of enabling donors and agencies from the West to approach the issue of governance in the developing world, and to include it as a central part of their strategies. "Good Governance" was the term used to describe this new strategy. It involved mainly the construction of good, lasting, democratic institutions. Accountability, free and fair elections, effective leadership, and participation were all central pillars to this new paradigm.

This coincided with what has been hailed as the "Third Wave" of democratisation around the world. Identified by Samuel P Huntington, this term described the wave of democratisation that swept the developing world between 1974 and 1992.³ Southern Europe, Latin America and finally, the countries of the old communist bloc were among the main movers.

The era also saw a number of broad generalisations about the future of political organisation in light of this apparent triumph of democracy. Most famously, this was put forward in Francis Fukuyama's article, 'The End of History?',⁴ in which he claims that liberal democracy had won a kind of 'battle of ideas' against other ideologies. The presumptive subtext being that it was now an historical imperative that this form of political organisation should now be spread to all parts of the world that it was not currently present.

Although the idea of civil society has existed for centuries, the term took on new importance in the 1990's when a series of theoretical works linked the presence of civil society to

² Carothers and Ottaway, pg 5.

³ Huntington, S. P. (1992) *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press, Oklahoma, USA.

⁴ Fukuyama, F (1989) 'The End of History?', *The National Interest*, No.16.

healthy democracies. It has since become widely used by both theorists and donors. This is due in part to the perceived failure of good governance strategies up to the 1980's, and the failure of implementation of certain economic policies, such as the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP's) and the devastating economic consequences this wrought. In Africa, the 1980's are known as the 'lost decade' for development.

For many, the idea of civil society and associated ideas such as social capital are the 'missing link' in thinking about governance. Most donors in the world, from governmental donors to international non-governmental organisations (NGO's) now have 'civil society strengthening' projects in the countries they operate. The “strengthening” of civil society, often, is seen as a good governance objective rather than a means to an end.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis will divide its argument into three sections. The next chapter will explore the theory behind civil society's role in the governance agenda. It will look at what, according to liberal theorists, civil society is supposed to do. It will look in particular at its role in leveraging social capital and how that is supposed to help in terms of wider governance objectives. It will also look into other theories or conceptions of both concepts (civil society and social capital) in order to single out the specific liberal prescription most famously identified with Robert Putnam as but one among many theories. It will also look at particular formulations of these concepts that could perhaps prove more useful in an analytical sense.

The third chapter will look at the way the good governance agenda is being carried out in the developing world, and some of the problems associated with civil society's role in that agenda. It will look at an empirical example of why the civil society 'panacea' is perhaps not the best idea for many parts of the developing world. It will then look into the proliferation of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) which benefit from increased funding in governance aid. It will look at observed negative externalities of the central position NGO's have adopted, including the under representation of indigenous forms of civil society, and suggest a third way approach to civil society in the developing world as being more appropriate.

The fourth chapter will focus on Samoa, and in particular the institution of the fa'asamoa (the Samoan way). The central argument will be that the fa'asamoa is a good example of an indigenous form of civil society. It performs tasks ascribed to civil society such as interest aggregation and articulation, but more importantly, it acts as an important provider of social capital. It facilitates trust and reciprocity in Samoan society, acts as an important social network through which individuals gain assistance from others and therefore access to social resources. The fa'asamoa is an example of an institution that liberal theory would not class as civil society, yet which provides many of the benefits that liberal theory ascribes to civil society through affective rather than associative ties. The chapter also looks at Samoan and Pacific thought where it pertains to many of these themes.

Chapter Two: Civil Society and Social Capital in the Theoretical Literature

2.1 Defining Civil Society

One of the problems with the concept of civil society is that it can be notoriously difficult to define. Scholars writing about the concept often have to provide a definition of their own that suits their needs. The task of this chapter is to look at the way in which the concept has been written about and used by theorists and practitioners; it will not put forward its own definition. Rather, it will present the most commonly used and referred to ideas about civil society (identified as the 'liberal' conception) as well as some other traditions that occasionally come to the fore. This section, therefore, will discuss some of the relevant problems found in attempts at a definition, and provide some of the most used definitions to be found in the literature.

The London School of Economics (LSE) Centre for Civil Society defines civil society as: “the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values... [It is] distinct from... the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated... Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups”.⁵

While this definition is unusually detailed, it is typical in that it defines civil society as a sector of the wider society defined by associational groups which exist outside micro groups such as families, or macro political entities such as tribes or nations. It also exists outside of the market and is therefore readily identified by not-for-profit organisations. Importantly, it does make allowances in its description of the lines between civil society, the state and the market as blurred. This is an empirical observation, however, and the gist of the piece suggests that ideally, civil society forms a separate entity to the state and the market. This conception of civil society is typical of liberal readings, which as shall be seen below, exclude the family and related kinship groups, and defines civil society as something which provides an 'antidote' to the state and is therefore distinct and separate. As shall also be seen

⁵ London School of Economics, *What is Civil Society?*, (http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm), accessed 14/04/2008.

below, these ideas can be somewhat problematic.

Gordon White describes civil society as “an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organizations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of the society to protect or extend their interests or values.”⁶ This definition is in the same vein as the LSE definition, although it is more at pains to separate civil society definitively from the state. It is important to note that the term 'associational' often appears in definitions of civil society, but it is usually qualified to limit itself to certain types of organisations. The associational element is also very important for liberal definitions of civil society, as it defines what it is civil society is supposed to do. Providing an associational realm in which good democratic values can be learned is, as shall be seen, the most important aspect of civil society according to this theoretical viewpoint.

Various problems have been raised regarding attempts to define civil society. For instance, the two definitions above do not negate organisations whose aim is less than 'civil'. Voluntary associations that exist with the aim of inciting ethnic hatred would pass the test. It is an ongoing controversy as to whether these groups belong to civil society, and in fact, how important the concept of 'civility' is in judging an organisation's qualification.

The concept has blurry edges and this is made apparent when examining certain groups that may or may not be defined as part of civil society. For instance embryonic political parties that start life as voluntary organisations (many definitions exclude groups that seek political power), or groups that are in themselves voluntary but are co-opted by corporate entities for profit seeking ends, such as fake grassroots organisations (known as astro-turfs).

In general though, definitions of civil society are necessarily broad. It is a contested subject and theorists and donors alike approach it in different ways. As Goran Hyden states: “most analysts... define civil society as the realm of organized social life standing between the individual and the state.”⁷ This chapter will begin by looking at civil society as it is seen by theorists belonging to the liberal tradition which sees civil society as a distinct entity from both the market and the state, and, in fact, has an anti-state role. The last part of the chapter will look into some alternative conceptions, also from Western philosophical traditions.

⁶ White, Gordon (Autumn 1994) 'Civil Society, Democratization and Development (I): Clearing the Analytical Ground,' *Democratization*, vol. 1, No. 3, pg 379.

⁷ Hyden, G (1997) 'Civil Society, Social Capital, and Development: Dissection of a Complex Discourse', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 32, No. 1, pg 13.

2.2 The Role of Civil Society

The effects that civil society organisations (CSO's) are, according to the majority of the literature, supposed to have on the prospects for democracy can be broadly split into two camps. One is the 'social capital creating' role that came from the intellectual tradition based around Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, Robert Putnam, and the other theorists that came after him. The other, focuses on the more practical and observable effects that the civil society sector has on the political life of a country. This chapter will largely focus on the first of these two categories, civil society's social capital 'creating' role and the emphasis placed on this by liberal theorists. This section, however, will discuss some of the democracy-enhancing roles that have been ascribed to CSO's and which fit into the second camp.

In this area, the main defined role of civil society is to bring executive and legislative power to account. It is to play the part of the 'antidote to the state'.⁸ This is a very important role from a democratic (and 'good governance') point of view. Checks need to be made on governmental power to ensure their compliance to the rule of law, and to ensure the predictable and efficient running of government. In assessing the literature on civil society's role as a check against the state, Rollin Tusalem puts forward a number of specific points that have been made by various authors. Predominantly approaching the role of NGO's, and in particular, NGO's that work in the political arena, Tusalem finds that they can 'challenge abuses of executive or legislative authority', 'minimize arbitrary policies imposed by the state', 'expose forms of client/patron relationships or nepotism to the public', and compel state authorities to prosecute or penalize 'errant public officials'.⁹

Aside from the more antagonistic roles towards the state as mentioned above, civil society can also act on a positive level. It can offer an alternative to state-led efforts to monitor the efficacy of legislation or the transparency of state institutions.¹⁰ On a wider social scale, civil society can also play positive democracy enhancing roles. It can offer a flow of information to the population regarding government policy or practice, and it can help in the articulation of demands or grievances by particular groups in society.¹¹ In fact, one of the key roles ascribed to civil society is 'interest aggregation' and 'interest articulation', i.e. It can bring to the fore issues that might not otherwise warrant political attention, and garner support for

⁸ Van Rooy, A & Robinson, M (2002) in Van Rooy, A (ed) *Civil Society and the Aid Industry*, Earthscan Publications Ltd., London, UK, pg 46.

⁹ Tusalem, Rollin (2007) 'A Boon or a Bane? The Role of Civil Society in Third -or Fourth- Wave Democracies', *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pg. 364.

¹⁰ Tusalem, pg 364.

¹¹ Tusalem, pp 364-365.

particular issues by espousing them in the public arena. In this way it can help shape and sustain public debate about issues which affect people's lives. According to Tusalem's literature review, civil society can also 'promote social tolerance and diffuse ethnic rivalries'.¹² All these things should lead to a more informed and empowered public that can make better democratic choices, and one which will, hopefully, play by the rules of the game for a more harmonious democratic environment.

Many theorists writing about civil society, especially during the 1990's but it is also true today, are political scientists, and a great number of these are “transitologists” (i.e. they are involved in the study of democratic transitions, a branch of political science that rose to prominence during and after the transitions in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union). Larry Diamond is one such scholar. For Diamond, the “first and most basic functions of civil society” divide in to two areas, their purpose is to “to monitor and restrain the exercise of power by democratic states, and to democratize authoritarian states”.¹³ Therefore, civil society is defined by its objective which is to create, consolidate and uphold democratic regimes.

Diamond set out ten essential functions of civil society.¹⁴ Some of these were to do with associational life and the teaching of specific norms which will be explored below, but other vital points emerged. As stated above, the first and foremost role of civil society is to limit the power of the state and to aid in democratisation. The next three deal with the benefits of associational life learned in civil society and the aggregation and articulation of interests. The fourth, related to Tusalem's point above about promoting social tolerance, claims that civil society can introduce new issues that cut across existing social cleavages, be they class based or ethnic. In this way they cause people to think beyond these cleavages, and engage more with political processes.¹⁵

Another very important aspect is that civil society, or more specifically the organisations that make up civil society are an important recruiting and training ground for future political leaders. For some organisations this is their specific purpose, and they provide training programmes based around legal and political professions. Some organisations also have specific democracy building aims. Good examples of this are organisations that engage in non-partisan election monitoring.

Two of Diamond's key points relate to the way civil society organisations can have an important role in disseminating information. Obviously, it is important for any democracy

¹² Tusalem, pg 364.

¹³ Diamond, L (1994) Toward Democratic Consolidation, *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pg 7.

¹⁴ Diamond pp 7-11.

¹⁵ Diamond, pg 10.

that the citizens are informed and can make sound decisions, or that political leaders themselves are informed of issues that citizens find important. Diamond also extends this to include it as a key determinate of the success of long term structural economic changes, such as privatisation. A flow of information is needed because such long term changes can only be achieved in a sustainable way with the appropriate coalitions within society and the political scene.

Diamond's last point addresses a positive role that civil society plays relating to the state. As civil society acts to improve the effectiveness and therefore legitimacy of the state, citizens gain respect for the state and its institutions and begin to positively engage with it, further entrenching good democratic practice.¹⁶

The benefits of an active civil society to the prospects and sustainability of democratic systems can seem obvious. There are many examples, particularly from Eastern Europe where a vibrant civil society greatly assisted the transition to a democratic system, or the strengthening and deepening of an existing democracy. However it is not always so clear cut, and for many theorists the greater questions is not the more easily observed effects that civil society has on the political life of a country, but rather its effect on perceived deeper causes of democratic success or failure and institutional robustness. The chapter now turns to such a question with a review of the theoretical links between civil society and social capital.

¹⁶ Diamond, pg 11.

2.3 Social Capital

The link between social capital and civil society is now firmly established in the minds of development academics and political scientists. The concept of social capital provides a strong academic link between civil society and democratisation. This is due, first and foremost to the work of Robert Putnam, particularly his 1993 book “Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy”.¹⁷ This was the key work in forming an intellectual tradition regarding the prospects of democracy, which led to the greater importance of civil society in the eyes of academics and donors. It also helped precipitate the wide use of the term ‘social capital’.

Social capital is much like civil society in that competing definitions can be found in almost every work on the subject. In its very essence it is a conglomerate of many different concepts. Ideas of trust, civic associationalism, and democratic behaviour all find their way into definitions of social capital.

Theories about membership in voluntary organisations and the positive effect this has on democratic behaviour stretch back much further than Putnam. In 1963 Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba published “The Civic Culture”¹⁸ which found that members of voluntary organisations are “more politically active, more informed about politics, more sanguine about their ability to affect political life, and more supportive of democratic norms”.¹⁹

It wasn’t until the early 1990’s, however, that the debate became specifically framed around the concept of social capital. Robert Putnam’s 1993 book was a case study of regional politics in Italy. The central question of the book was why such a disparity existed between the north of Italy and the south in terms of political effectiveness. Why do local political bodies in the north perform better and are more successful in creating effective legislation than those in the south?

His answer lay in the presence of far greater levels of social capital in the north. The differing political climate in the two regions was marked by much higher levels of civic associationalism and trust in the north. What this meant was that the political system in the north had the advantage of more politically active citizens that ensured interest and vitality in the political system, and also trust, not just between citizens but also in political leaders

¹⁷ Putnam, R.D (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA.

¹⁸ Almond, G.A. & Verba, S. (1963) *The Civic Culture*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, USA.

¹⁹ Stolle, Dietlind (Sep 1998) “Bowling Together, Bowling Alone: The Development of Generalised Trust in Voluntary Associations”, *Political Psychology*, Vol. 19, No. 3, Special Issue: Psychological Approaches to Social Capital, pg 499.

and between political leaders. This results in a far reduced risk of politically motivated violence and corruption inside the political system itself.

David Halpern creates a useful distinction between different forms of democracy in order to better explain the concept of social capital. Primary democracy describes small local communities coming together to decide things which are of importance to the community. Secondary democracy describes the (usually) representative democratic decision making that occurs at a national or regional level. Third, tertiary democracy belongs on the “meta” or theoretical level and is about how imagined societies might organise themselves.²⁰

The effects of social capital at a primary level are obvious. When small groups of people get together to decide on important issues, the key difference as to whether or not their meetings will be useful, and effective decisions are made, are those many things that are grouped together under the banner of social capital. If a high level of trust is present, there have been frequent past meetings, and information is freely exchanged between individuals, the chances of a useful and effective decision making process will be much greater than if people don't know each other well, or there are clashes in personality resulting in less trust and a more acrimonious atmosphere.²¹

Essentially, the contention is that what is true at the primary level, is also true at the secondary level. Putnam describes a hypothetical community that is characterised by high levels of social capital, he calls it the 'civic community'.²² It is characterised by an active participation by its members in public affairs, and though its members may be motivated by self interest, it is a form of self interest which is defined in the context of broader public needs. Political equality is an important part of the community where horizontal relations of reciprocity and co-operation exist instead of hierarchical, vertical relations. Solidarity, trust and tolerance are very evident amongst the community members, although the community cannot be conflict free; there exists a tolerance and respect of conflicting opinions.

Key to Putnam's vision is a dense network of associations and social structures of co-operation. Putnam sees associations as incubators of the norms and values important in a wider civic community, “civil associations contribute to the effectiveness and stability of democratic government, it is argued, both because of their 'internal' effects on individual members and because of their 'external' effects on the wider polity.”²³ In this sense, it is possible to see an active and vibrant civil society as a form of training ground where

²⁰ Halpern, David (2005) *Social Capital*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, pg 171.

²¹ Halpern, pp 172-173.

²² Putnam, R.D (1993), pp 87-90.

²³ Putnam, pg 89.

members of the public learn the values associated with social capital.

Putnam is widely associated with the idea that civic associations, particularly voluntary associations, strengthen the civic community and therefore contribute to democracy. It was his famous assertion that bowling leagues help democracy in his 2001 work, “Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community”.²⁴

2.3.1 Reciprocity and Trust

But why is social capital important for an effective democracy? It is a widely held belief that politically active and well informed citizens are important for an active democracy and that in fact, legitimate democracy requires citizen participation.²⁵ In this respect, the norms and values gained through participation in voluntary associations are vital, as are what associations themselves can offer the community. Associations that are formed around a certain interest can facilitate 'interest aggregation' and 'interest articulation'²⁶ meaning that they can help bring issues to the public and set the terms of political debate.

Outside of the realm of what civic associationalism can bring, two concepts stand out as being the most important when linking the idea of social capital, to its role in upholding and strengthening democracy, namely, reciprocity and trust. These two concepts are also the key variables used (usually) in measuring the presence of social capital in a given society. If the norms of trust and reciprocity are strongly present in society, it can be said that there is a high level of social capital.

Both reciprocity and trust can be understood in the individual and general sense. That is, they both have meaning when explaining the acts of individuals, and the cohesive nature of society as a whole.

Trust on an individual level is the presence of trust between individuals. In a society characterised by a high level of social capital, people tend to trust one another to not do them any harm, or to uphold their end of a transaction or contract. Where this norm is not present, individual agency can be hampered as shall be investigated below. Generalised trust describes a level of trust not just towards another individual, but towards many individuals, organisations and institutions that make up society. In particular, trust of political officials, including elected officials. In this sense it has a direct impact on the fortunes of democracy.

²⁴ Putnam, R.D. (2001) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community*, Simon & Schuster, London, UK.

²⁵ Halpern, pg 188.

²⁶ Putnam (1993), pg 90.

What is the point of voting for someone if you do not trust them to implement their avowed policies?

Norms of reciprocity are often the result of high levels of trust. Reciprocity can also be seen on an individual and general level. Putnam makes the distinction between 'balanced' and 'generalised' reciprocity.²⁷ Balanced reciprocity describes a situation where there is a simultaneous exchange of items of equal worth. For instance, two farmers, one who has a surplus of eggs, might make a deal with the other farmer, who has a dairy farm, to supply him eggs in exchange for an equal value of milk. In this way they are benefitting each other by giving the other something they can easily afford in exchange for something they do not have or would otherwise have to buy elsewhere. Generalised reciprocity describes a situation that is present throughout society. People will give items to or provide services for other people without an expectation that they will be immediately 'repaid'. A general sense exists that one good turn deserves another, and that an act of charity towards another will be reciprocated in an undefined time, in an undefined way, and even to an unequal level. Therefore, when a person's neighbour goes on holiday, and he is asked to look after their pets while they are gone, he won't necessarily expect payment, or for the neighbours to do something for him immediately. Rather, not necessarily because of his actions but because of a generalised sense of reciprocity, he can reasonably expect his neighbours to be happy to do him a good turn when he needs it.

It may well be self evident that generalised trust and reciprocity are good things. In areas where these norms are prevalent, people's lives would be much easier. There would exist a sense of social connectedness and the advantages that come with reciprocity. But why would they necessarily be good for democracy? Surely, the view exists that democracy is about competition, such that a general sense of reciprocity is not necessarily important. The real value that these norms present is in ensuring that the rules of the game are adhered to. There can exist plenty of competition, but what is to stop it erupting into conflict, perhaps even violent conflict? If norms of social trust and reciprocity are present, there is a mediating effect on extremes like violence, differences in opinion are accepted if not agreed with, and the perpetrator of violence or other anti-social acts would soon find themselves shut out of relationships of trust and reciprocity, in other words, they would find themselves without social capital.

²⁷ Putnam (1993), pg 172.

2.3.2 The Free Rider Problem

Importantly however, a large part of the value of the norms associated with social capital come into focus when analyzing a very important aspect of democracy, that of collective action. The presence of social capital, and civic associationalism, lets individuals discover how 'by working together, they can collectively achieve satisfactions that they cannot as individuals'.²⁸ In fact, collective action, in the most common form it appears, i.e. within voluntary associations, is, according to Putnam, the most important training ground to create a virtuous cycle of social capital creation. The second part of this chapter will focus more on voluntary organisations or civil society organisations, but it is important to first explore how the presence of social capital can help facilitate civic associationalism, which will then reinforce the level of social capital and so on, completing the 'virtuous cycle' mentioned above.

Political game theory has thrown into sharp relief many problems associated with collective action. In particular, they focus on the rewards and penalties faced by either co-operating with others, or defecting from that co-operation. Through this they gain an insight into the choices individuals face regarding collective action.

The thought experiment 'prisoners dilemma' is an example of one. In the scenario, two prisoners, who have both been arrested for the same crime, are interviewed separately. They are both told that if they both say nothing (i.e. Co-operate) they will both serve a six month sentence for a minor offence. If they both testify against the other (i.e. Defect) they will both serve a sentence for 5 years. If, however they choose different options, the one that co-operated will serve 10 years, while the one that defected will be set free. From an individual, self-maximising position, there is only one option: Defect. The fact that they cannot know what the other has chosen means that to defect will probably give the best results for an individual, despite the fact that if they had both chosen to co-operate, the total combined sentence is only one year, and for every other option it totals 10 years.

While this kind of thought experiment can be used in many different situations, it throws light on individual responses to collective action, and the 'free rider' problem that can occur because of it. Robert Putnam uses the example of rotating credit associations that exist in many parts of the world, especially poorer parts of the world, as a form of mutual aid. Each member of the association will put in a small amount of money every month (for instance), and the fund will slowly build up money. Each year, the entire fund is given to one of the contributors, and this large inflow of cash can help them with something that is very

²⁸ Halpern, pg 184.

expensive and beyond their usual means, i.e. to pay for a wedding celebration, make improvements to their land, or avert a crisis.

The idea of rotating credit associations suffers, at least in theory (and sometimes in practice) from the free rider problem. The idea of a large payout will keep people in the scheme, but what will occur once they have received their payout and their turn won't come around again for a long time, yet they still have to pay a small amount each month?²⁹

Rotating credit associations only work well in areas characterised by high social trust. The existence of the association itself demonstrates the commitment present to norms of reciprocity. It also helps that generally, defectors in ventures of this nature are met with social ostracism, and the unlikelihood that they will be invited to take part in future mutual aid ventures.

Even the prisoner's dilemma looks more hopeful if we know that the two prisoners trust each other to not do harm to the other. As Fransisco Herreros says: "Trust is, after all, an expectation, a belief about the other players' strategies."³⁰ Similar situations are faced in the realms of economics and politics, and a generalised sense of trust is the glue which holds these systems together. There is no point in collective action, so important for a functioning democracy, if there is not a countervailing force, like the norms associated with social capital, acting against the free-rider problem.

²⁹ Putnam (1993), pg 168.

³⁰ Herreros, Fransisco (2004) *The Problem of Forming Social Capital: Why Trust?*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, USA, pg 28.

2.4 Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society and Social Capital.

So far in this chapter, a theoretical perspective has been put forward regarding the importance of a vibrant civil society to success in democratic governance. It has been argued that civil society, meaning the voluntary sector of society that exists between the level of the family and the level of the state, and not including the market, was the key agent for the creation of social capital. Social capital, in turn, meaning aggregate levels of certain norms, in particular 'trust' and 'reciprocity'. As in Putnam's analysis, higher levels of social capital mean a stronger change of deeply embedded democracy. A 'virtuous circle' is created when these two concepts combine adding to the civic spiritedness of the populace. They provide the 'missing link' that has plagued theorists regarding the success of democratic institutions in some parts of the world as compared to others.

2.4.1 Civil Society

This has been the reading of social capital and civil society that has formed the bulk of the literature and that which has been adopted by the donor community. It is, however, not the only reading of the two concepts to be found in the literature. Civil society in particular has a very long history in Western political thought. It has its genesis in Eighteenth Century debates, and the differing positions have formed different philosophical traditions. Thinkers such as Rousseau, Locke, Thomas Paine, and of course Alexis d'Tocqueville all approached the subject.

Geographically, conceptions of civil society have also been markedly different. In Latin America, civil society movements grew up largely in opposition to dictatorial regimes, much like they did in Eastern Europe. In Latin America, however, there was also a consensus that party politics had failed, and therefore civil society was conceptualised as standing in place of parties as well as being against a repressive state.³¹

A distinctive radical European tradition is also evident. The themes that lie behind this tradition challenge the American assumption that "civil society, a strong democracy, and economic progress" are "conceptually or empirically connected in a unproblematic way."³²

For instance, a common critique of liberal democracy is that it cements the power of the

³¹ Edwards, B and Foley, M (1998) "Civil Society and Social Capital Beyond Putnam", *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol. 42, No. 1, pg 125.

³² Howell, J and Pierce, J (2001) *Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., Boulder, Colorado, pg 51.

already privileged in society. It protects individual and particular interests and through the mechanism of elections every few years, it effectively limits mass participation. This tradition in fact encompasses the work of many NGO's around the world, whose aim is protecting the weak, and ensuring the have a voice in “defining the universal concerns that should then be actively promoted and implemented at higher levels of governance.”³³ This tradition finds its genesis in the work of Rousseau who stressed the need to pursue the 'common good' over particular interests.

The idea of the 'common good' is similar to the idea of civil society as the 'good society'. In contrast to Putnam's associational ideal, Michael Edwards posits another strain of thought which sets the ultimate goal as not having a 'strong civil society' but rather a 'society that is strong and civil'. Edwards claims that the idea of civil society as a metaphor for the good society has roots in the Greek *polis*, and ideal religious communities such as the Islamic *Ummah* and the Jewish *Tikkun Olam*, as well as Kantian thinking about a global ethical community.³⁴ Currently, it is espoused by many differing individuals and groups from all different political stripes, such as liberal democrats, the Global Justice Movement and Islamic traditionalists. Tolerance, non-discrimination, non-violence, trust and cooperation are common themes.³⁵

Another strand that has arisen comes from the Marxist tradition. Marx saw the civil sphere as providing an artificial equality. The true relationships in civil society were inequality and exploitation³⁶ according to his ideas about capitalism. Antonio Gramsci identified civil society as “an arena where associations of different kinds can both disseminate the ideas that reinforce capitalism as well as dispute them”.³⁷ This runs counter to the liberal ideal, where the existence of a strong civil society essentially supports individual rights and strengthens a liberal system of democracy. Capitalism is usually an essential ingredient of this.

The liberal conception, in which civil society identified as voluntary associationalism leverages social capital thus providing a better democratic environment, has been coined “neo-Tocquevillian” after Alexis d'Toqueville's observations of early nineteenth century America. It is a term used to distinguish this set of theories from the ones mentioned above.

2.4.2 Social Capital

³³ Howell and Pierce, pg 53.

³⁴ Edwards, M (2004) *Civil Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, pg 38.

³⁵ Edwards, pg 38.

³⁶ Howell and Pierce, pg 53.

³⁷ Howell and Pierce, pg 54.

As stated previously, the road via which civil society has its greatest impact on the prospects for democracy in any given society, according to liberal theory, is through its role in social capital creation. With this in mind, it becomes essential to examine the concept of social capital as it is presented in Putnam's work, and look at alternative conceptions that might prove more useful in an analytical sense.

The dominant view of social capital in the liberal conception, and particularly in Putnam's work sees social capital as an aggregate level of the norms of trust and reciprocity found within a given society. Inherent in this view is a path-dependant explanation of social capital and its presence in particular societies. Michael Foley and Bob Edwards have argued of the need for a greater contextualisation of social capital within certain social structures.³⁸ They contest that the effect of this will make social capital a more useful concept in examining social structures outside of Western culture, such as the examples in the coming chapter from the South Pacific. This in turn will allow for a more balanced approach to the question of civil society, and what it does towards progressing democracy in these contexts.

The debate about the best way to conceptualise social capital and its efficacy in the process of democratic consolidation is an interesting debate, and, like the conceptualisation of civil society, it has its origins in different philosophical strands. The concept of social capital itself has been around for decades in different formulations. Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman are generally credited with first popularising the concept in the 1980's. James Coleman in particular added new currency to the term within sociological research. He defined social capital by its function. It was conceived of as 'social-structural' resources that acted as a capital asset for individuals. According to Coleman, social capital consisted of a variety of different entities that had two things in common; they all "consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure."³⁹

This is markedly different from Putnam's approach, which emphasised the presence of certain norms on an aggregate level, rather than the access to social resources on an individual level. Michael Foley, Bob Edwards, and Mario Diani find that social capital, narrowly conceived in terms of trust and reciprocity as has been the case in much of the relevant academic discourse since the publication of Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*, is little more than a stand in for old 'political culture' variables and find that as an analytical

³⁸ Foley, M, Edwards, B and Diani, M, 'Social Capital Reconsidered' in Foley, M, Edwards, B and Diani, M (eds), (2001) *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective*, University Press of New England, Hanover, NH, USA.

³⁹ Coleman, J. S. (1990) *Foundations of Social Theory*, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, pg 302.

concept it is mostly a 'dead end'.⁴⁰ They take the concept of social trust and find that there is little evidence that the presence of larger levels of social trust in a population has any bearing on democratic prospects of the country in question. In fact, they find that the presence of social trust is most likely to be seen as an effect of social, economic or political institutions that work well for some if not most of the population, rather than an underlying cause of effective political institutions.⁴¹

Michael Foley and Bob Edwards in particular have long advocated the need to rethink social capital as a dependant variable that is conceived of in terms of particular social and political contexts, in other words to reintegrate context dependency into the debate. They argue that Putnam's conception of social capital fails to take into account the availability of access to social capital, or more accurately the raw social resources that can be used to facilitate group action, for different groups or individuals within society. Putnam's approach aggregates social capital as something that is either available or not available within a society. In their words: "The context dependency of social capital poses conceptual and methodological difficulties for analysts using it to explain the kinds of macro social, political and economic outcomes of interest to many political scientists and economists. In such analyses a perverse trade-off exists. The more bluntly one measures social capital and the higher the level of social organization characteristic of the process being explained, the more the model must posit that all social capital is of equal value and that all relationships (or networks, or associations) provide equal access."⁴²

In reality, this is not the case. Within a given society, there exist many different groups and within those groups, sub-groups and individuals who possess vastly different levels and types of access to social resources. A context dependant approach to social capital frames the concept not as the presence of certain norms, as is the case with Putnam, but rather as those structures which allow access to social resources, differing networks of which voluntary organisations are a part, but only a part, of what is a more holistic view, and a more useful concept. Coleman's conception has a much wider potential. In one of his earlier works exploring the subject, Coleman looked at social capital in the context of high school dropouts and discussed it in terms of its effect on education.⁴³

Coleman emphasises the importance of social networks as providers of social resources.

⁴⁰ Foley Edwards and Diani, pg 274.

⁴¹ Foley Edwards and Diani, pg 274.

⁴² Foley, MW and Edwards, B (1999) "Is it Time to Disinvest in Social Capital?", *Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 2, pg 146.

⁴³ Coleman, J. S. (1988) "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital", *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94, Supplement: Organizations and Institutions: Sociological and Economic Approaches to the Analysis of Social Structure

Putnam also included networks as one of the key components of social capital, but in his reading they were tied to the norms that it was their role to promote. The difference between the two is that while norms can be culturally specific, the presence of social networks is readily observable and objective.⁴⁴ Separating form and function in this way allows for a less biased view of social capital in a given society. It allows one to observe social networks and look at the norms that they are actually promoting. It thus liberates itself from necessarily seeing voluntary associationalism as the path to the norms of trust and reciprocity. This will become very important in the fourth chapter, when looking at Pacific thought, and the norms and values inherent the fa'asamoa system.

The social/structural approach to social capital employed by Coleman allows a context dependant analysis within different social structures. This differs to Putnam's approach because of an apparent cultural bias in his conception of social capital and especially his emphasis on the importance of civic associationalism in the creation of social capital. The realisation of context dependency makes social capital a more useful concept within western societies, but also outside of western societies. While it may be possible to better understand the acquisition and use of social capital within particular groups, trades, or organisations, it is also more possible to explore the role of social capital in other cultural contexts.

Both Coleman and Putnam are liberal theorists, and the differences between their two conceptions are not as radical as the differences between the various ideas relating to civil society presented above. However it is important to note these differences as it is Putnam's theory that has generated the most excitement which has in turn advised the governance strategies of international donors. Though in reality it seems to be the most historically and culturally biased of the two.

⁴⁴ Newton, K (2001) "Social Capital and Democracy" in Foley, M, Edwards, B, and Diani, M (eds), (2001) *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective*, University Press of New England, Hanover, NH, USA, pg 227.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explain why a theoretical link exists between the idea of civil society and the idea of good governance, namely greater democratisation. In doing so, it has identified two broad camps that exist in the theoretical literature in describing this apparently positive relationship. Civil society has both real and practical effects on democratic institutions within countries, and deeper effects as documented in the second part of the chapter. Civil society can be seen as a 'training ground' in which people engage in associational life and learn the values of trust and reciprocity. This in turn makes them good citizens, ready to act in the interests of the community and ready to engage in the democratic life of the community without recourse to violence or other extreme acts in order to secure their interests. They will be respectful of points of view that differ from their own and will be willing to compromise in true democratic spirit.

It has also identified this particular view of civil society and social capital, and the way they relate to governance, as but one among a number of theoretical traditions relating to both concepts. They are contested terms, yet the particular reading that has most influenced the recent rise to prominence of civil society as a panacea for governance ills around the world is grounded in Western liberal theory, and based on Western historical experience. Civil society has had a long history and the definitions posited at the beginning of the chapter demonstrate that the majority of current thought focuses on a liberal 'neo-Tocquevillian' conception. Michael Edwards reminds us that there are other theoretical strands, including the idea of the 'good society', or 'society which is civil', as well as a distinctly Marxist conception. Finally, looking in to differing ideas about the concept of social capital reveals some weaknesses in Putnam's definition. The prospect of exploring social capital in differing cultural contexts becomes more possible by realising that form and function can be separate. If social capital is seen as less a combined aggregate of networks and norms, and more as the presence of social networks through which individuals gain social resources, the focus can be put on what kind of norms are being created, and the kinds of collective action it can induce. This makes it possible to conceive of forms of civil society and social capital that could enhance governance, but which do not meet the voluntary associative ideal inherent in liberal thought.

The next chapter will explore some of the main criticisms that have been made regarding the good governance 'agenda' for civil society in its application in developing countries.

Chapter Three: Civil Society and the Good Governance Agenda in the Developing World

3.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter has looked in some detail at civil society and social capital in the way that they relate to democratisation, or better governance. The intent of the last part was to muddy the waters around the underpinning liberal theory behind civil society's role in the good governance agenda and to make clear that the liberal 'neo-tocquevillian' conception, namely, Robert Putnam's assumptions about the creation and role of social capital, and his particular conception of civil society, are but one among a number of theories about the role of civil society, and the use of the concept of social capital.

The liberal conception of civil society's role as a promoter of democracy is full of assumptions. They have to do with civil society's role vis-a-vis the state and the private sector, the inherent potential of civil society to provide an effective balance on the state, the potential of civil society to act as a learning ground for the norms associated with social capital, and democracy's reliance on these norms as a cultural precondition.

As has already been claimed, those assumptions have been translated, since the 1990's, to the governing policies of international development donors. These donors, be they International Financial Institutions (IFI's) such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund, bilateral government donors such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) or the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) or even International Non-governmental Organisations (INGO's) like Oxfam, have to differing degrees jumped on the civil society 'bandwagon'. This chapter will look into these donor's activities in the realm of civil society promotion and seek to critically assess the impacts in developing countries.

It has already been alluded to in previous chapters that a key problem with the civil society agenda is that it represents a transferral of Western political experience to other parts of the world. These other parts of the world may be areas where such ideas or institutions might be meaningless or at worst, destabilising. Proponents of Putnam's views have been labelled by critics as 'neo-Tocquevillians', and their findings are said to be based on such a specific time,

and in such a specific space (i.e. the United States in the early 19th Century) that the transferral of these values and practices to, say, today's Sub-Saharan Africa is so difficult that some have labelled it as ultimately pointless. This stands in direct contrast to liberal assertions about the universality of civil society and its positive effects on social capital and governance. The second part of this chapter will look at ways in which the civil society agenda could be viewed.

The first part of this chapter, however, will focus on some of the key studies that back up the idea that the governance agenda for civil society is ultimately flawed. That 'neo-Tocquevillian' thought makes little sense in the context of developing countries, and areas where in practice, the actions of donors and NGO's have perhaps caused more harm than good.

It is necessary, at the beginning, to defend the view that international development donors do, in fact, subscribe to the 'neo-Tocquevillian' liberal view, identified in the preceding chapter. In other words, do international donors see the funding of civil society organisations as an end in itself while trying to achieve good governance objectives. Do they subscribe to the view that CSO's perform important functions in and of themselves in providing a check on the state's excesses and articulating political demands, but also act as important wellsprings of social capital by embodying and teaching the norms of trust and reciprocity that are apparently so important to the success of democracy?

Peter Davis and J. McGregor, writing about civil society funding in Bangladesh, note that civil society's positive role in terms of transition to and consolidation of democracy that donors often espouse, draws heavily on the works of mainstream liberal political scientists from America, including Seymour Martin Lipset, Larry Diamond, and Juan Linz.⁴⁵ Also, "Robert Putnam's interpretation of Social Capital, seen as a variable underpinning effective democratic governance, is also usually prominent in donor documentation."⁴⁶

The presence of "Putnamesque" or neo-Tocquevillian thought behind donor activities is explicitly espoused by the World Bank. In its section on civil society, the World Bank's website states: "CSOs can play an important role in helping to amplify the voices of the poorest people in the decisions that affect their lives, improve development effectiveness and sustainability, and hold governments and policymakers publicly accountable."⁴⁷ This represents the bank's alignment with the liberal view of civil society as an 'antidote' to the state, as well as being a forum for the aggregation and articulation of demands. Elsewhere in

⁴⁵ Davis, P. and McGregor, J. A. (2000) "Civil Society, International Donors and Poverty in Bangladesh", *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 1, pp 51-2.

⁴⁶ Davis and McGregor, pg 52.

⁴⁷ [The World Bank, Frequently Asked Questions <http://go.worldbank.org/3L5WS8C510> accessed 09/6/2008](http://go.worldbank.org/3L5WS8C510)

the website, it is stated that: “The World Bank has learned through these three decades of interaction that the participation of CSOs in government development projects and programs can enhance their operational performance by contributing local knowledge, providing technical expertise, and leveraging social capital.”⁴⁸ Although it is a harder point to put across in the context of a website that is trying to be brief, it still makes the point that “leveraging social capital” is one of the key roles for civil society, and the key reasons that it forms such a big part of the Bank's governance programme. These examples are used to demonstrate that it is by no means controversial to claim that key development donors, in the inclusion of civil society strengthening in their governance programmes, draw on particular liberal Western theories in their guiding principles. In particular, the liberal view of civil society and its importance to democratic governance that arose (mainly) in the 1990's, has been key to formulating the policies of these organisations.

⁴⁸ The World Bank, <<http://go.worldbank.org/PWRRFJ2QH0>> accessed, 09/06/2008

3.2 Civil Society in the Developing World

This liberal conception of civil society and social capital places emphasis on the role of civil society as a “third sector” alongside the state and the market. In classic liberal and neo-liberal thought, while the market supplies and distributes goods and services, and the state upholds the law, e.g. to protect private property and the sanctity of contracts, civil society provides, largely, everything else. It is the associational realm in which ideas are contested and it is largely informal. It is the key to providing some of the basic tenets of democracy as has been discussed earlier.

In development, it is often necessary for the separate functions of this 'triadic' arrangement to work together. In the good governance agenda, it is often the case that state institutions and civil society must come together for the same goals. Most of the large international donor organisations are state institutions, such as USAID, DFID, and NZAID. In their funding of civil society organisations, there are key structural and operational aims they must meet. Within state institutions, particularly those attached to western governments, accountability is a key requirement, both in financial terms and in operational terms. If USAID financially backs a project, that project must keep account of all its expenditure, while at the same time justifying that expenditure by providing a discernable result.

This has a number of effects. First of all, it affects the type of organisations that donors tend to fund or provide assistance to. They must be able to provide account of their activities in a way that is readily recognisable to their politically accountable donors. This greatly limits the amount of 'CSO's' that receive funding. In particular, international NGO's and local NGO's that are already organised around Western accounting practises and democratic norms, in short, organisations that 'resemble' the donors that fund them.

While it can be claimed that liberal thought in general is culturally specific, so it can with the way in which this ideology views the role of civil society. In fact, civil society has elsewhere been described as a metaphor for Western liberalism.⁴⁹ This may miss critical aspects of social life in those developing countries that do not share the same historical experience as those in the west. Many groups, for instance, find themselves excluded from donor's definitions of what civil society is. Non-voluntary groups based on ties that are not simply associational, for instance (such as tribal groups), may contribute to a large degree to

⁴⁹ Seckinelgin, H. (2002) “Civil Society as a Metaphor for Western Liberalism”. *Civil Society Working Papers*, Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics, Working Paper 21, <www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/pdf/CSWP/CSWP21.pdf>

social cohesiveness (or even social capital) will find themselves left out.

The next two sections will look at first, arguments that point out that funding civil society may not be the best way to ensure satisfactory political change, particularly in reference to its comparison to institutions of the state and other democratic institutions, and reasons why it may have a negative aggregate result. The second section will look at NGO's as the main conduit for civil society funding in the developing world and some of the negative externalities associated with that.

3.2.1 Civil Society, Democratic Institutions and the State

Much is made of the question of whether it is civil society, or existing democratic institutions that are the most important variable for the success of a healthy functioning democracy. Much is also made of the effect that an inflated focus on civil society could have on other institutions, for instance the state in its service delivery role.

Recently, Omar G. Encarnacion published a book attacking the good governance agenda for civil society. The thrust of his attack was based on a comparative study he undertook, looking at the democratic transitions of Spain and Brazil. His claim was that one of those countries (Spain) achieved a very satisfactory and sustainable political transition despite the very low level of civil society organisations and associational density found in that country. Comparatively, Brazil, which according to Encarnacion has much higher levels of civic associationalism, has failed to institute a successful democratic culture, and its political life is still often mired by corruption and anti-democratic practices. The lesson he drew from this was that first and foremost, “democratic consolidation depends for its success upon efficient and stable political institutions rather than vibrant and robust civil societies” and also, that “we have... misunderstood what matters most about civil society in connection to the process of democratic consolidation... we are better served by shifting our analytical lenses towards the performance of the political system”.⁵⁰ This last point referred to the fact that while much analysis focused on the measurement of associational density and other indicators that would demonstrate a strength in civil society, less analysis focuses on the actual outcome, in governance terms, of those processes. What this means is that we may have lost site of the goal while becoming enamoured with a particular ideological strain of thought.

Encarnacion has been criticized for not going into as much detail as he perhaps should as far

⁵⁰ Encarnacion, O. G. (2003) *The Myth of Civil Society: Social Capital and Democratic Consolidation in Spain and Brazil*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, USA, Pg 9.

as his claim that we should focus more on 'supporting democratic institutions'. However, he does claim that donor support of particular areas where executive power is most apparent, and key features of democracies, such as the electoral process, during democratic transitions and beyond, would do much more to ensure public support for and trust in the political actors and institutions which goes a long way towards building 'social capital'.

The civil society agenda has also been contrasted against the role of the state. There has been a suggestion that the strengthening of civil society may not just be less effective than supporting political institutions, but rather it is harmful to the state itself, and thus it serves a politically destabilising role, perhaps endangering political transitions or the capability of the state to function in the way that it should.

There is certainly a common belief among some observers that the dynamic between CSO's, especially NGO's and the state may actually be damaging to the state. This is of particular importance to newly emerging democracies, as it deals with the issue of legitimacy. As NGO's go about the business of development assistance, many of the key state service delivery areas are co-opted. This harms state legitimacy, as people become more stakeholders in NGO activity, than they do of the State. Bangladesh, in particular, has been described as a "franchise state".⁵¹ International NGO's are accountable to outside donors and are therefore not affected by political change within the affected country. Also, as people become disengaged with affairs of the state they become less likely to engage in political processes.

In this vein, another body of work links the civil society agenda with the neo-liberal project, or at least claims that it strengthens the "antistate bias"⁵² of the neo-liberal agenda. Despite many differing political or cultural contexts, donors still see civil society as essentially fulfilling a role in which it attacks the state, or defends society against it. The growth of the governance agenda, according to this point of view, grew as a response to the failure of the economic liberalisation strategies of the 1980's known as the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP's). If this basic economic policy did not work, it could only be the fault of corrupt and inefficient governments. Lack of internal interest in reforms could be overcome by essentially going over the heads of governments and funding alternative service providers and groups which could hold the state accountable.⁵³ It was also cheaper than attempting to achieve large scale reform, as Thomas Carothers writes: "Funding citizen activism seemed to hold out the promise of a low-cost way to achieve large-scale effects. Thus civil society

⁵¹ Mercer, C (2002), "NGO's Civil Society and Democratization; A Critical Review of the Literature", *Progress In Development Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Pg 19.

⁵² Howell, J and Pierce, J (2001) *Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., Boulder, Colorado, USA pg 39.

⁵³ Howell and Pierce, pp 40-41.

programmes grew as aid budgets shrank”.⁵⁴ At the very least, international donors do not engage in funding aspects of civil society that challenges the “status quo of on-going neo-liberal reform”.⁵⁵

It has also been noted, that the funding of civil society represents an overall cost cutting measure. Funding expensive changes to government institutions compared unfavourably to simply putting smaller amounts of money into the hands of CSO's. Armed with the requisite theory, it could be argued that this would aid the consolidation of democratic practice in the long run. This is especially true of USAID, the largest spender when it comes to CSO's.⁵⁶

Civil society funding, for the purposes ascribed to it by international donors, may not be the best path to good governance. As Omar Encarnacion's work points out, the empirical evidence for favouring civil society over the strengthening democratic institutions is a little thin, and he provides a clear counter-example. It also could be the case that emphasis on civil society has the potentially destabilising effect of weakening state infrastructure and legitimacy.

3.2.2 NGO's: a Blessing or a Curse?

In the context of the developing world, especially in parts of the world that are seen by donors to have a very weak indigenous civil society, the key agents of democratic change have become Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's), many of which do not originate in the country in question, but rather in the developed world. NGO's have increasingly become the focal point for good governance funding.⁵⁷ It should be pointed out that NGO's are usually distinguished from Grass Roots Organisations (GRO's) which are usually single issue based and non-professional. NGO's are identified by the fact that they are often “large and well resourced”, have professional staff which are often “urban professionals or expatriates” and receive high levels of funding (often international).⁵⁸

NGO's have been thus favoured by multilateral and bilateral donors for a myriad of reasons. Firstly, they more immediately resemble the type of civil society found in the West. Civil Society in the developing world in which grassroots democracy has not yet taken hold, including tribal and ethnic groups, fledgling grassroots movements and the like, often fail to

⁵⁴ Carothers, 1999, pg 209 (Quoted in Howell and Pierce, pg 41).

⁵⁵ Mohan, G (2002) “The Disappointments of Civil Society: The Politics of NGO Intervention in Northern Ghana”, *Political Geography*, Vol. 21, pg 131.

⁵⁶ Carothers and Ottaway Pg 7-8.

⁵⁷ Mercer, pg 6.

⁵⁸ Mercer, pg 6.

meet donor's criteria. This dynamic is especially apparent when the NGO in question has originated itself in the Western world. It is also true that many NGO's have proved themselves in terms of their engagement with poor communities, and are thus very attractive as nodes of development funding. This section will look into some of the observed negative externalities that arise from NGO's favoured position in terms of civil society funding.

Returning to the point made in the preceding section about the behaviour of donors in funding organisations that resemble them in terms of things like accounting practices (which often favour large well resourced NGO's), observations have also been made about the concentration of donor funding at the doors of NGO's, particularly of the international variety. For instance, Alison Van Rooy notes that in Kenya, the major funding institutions (USAID, The Ford Foundation, NORAD) provide the bulk of their funding to organisations like the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC), the Research and Civic Awareness Programme (RECAP), and the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA).⁵⁹ Van Rooy puts this down to a number of reasons. The mandates that these organisations hold (e.g. law and human rights) are central to the mandates of the funding organisations as well. This outsourcing of work, which could be the result of a process of self-selection may result in donors backing up what they see as important in their own country rather than what might be most urgent or appropriate in the country where the organisation is based. Van Rooy also claims that the reputation of the organisation or its leader is also a key determinate in selecting organisations. This could lead to relatively unknown organisations or groups to not even register on a donor's shortlist.⁶⁰

The good governance agenda adds to this phenomenon. While, theoretically, it is the associational values that have encouraged the switch to civil society funding, organisations are often chosen based on the particular values they espouse. Davis and McGregor state that “one of the issues arising from the influence of the liberal political science discourse on the international donor establishment is its particular normative approach to civil society. Particular types of organisation are seen as qualifying on the basis of their democracy-promoting characteristics and organisations deemed as antagonistic or counterproductive in the project of democratisation are excluded.”⁶¹ This, in a developing world setting, precludes a huge number of groups and movements. Groups that are both well organised and focus their attention specifically on democratic or democracy enhancing activities tend to be NGO's, even INGO's from the developed world.

⁵⁹ Maina, W, (1998) “Kenya: The State, Donors and the Politics of Democratization”, in Van Rooy, A (ed) *Civil Society and the Aid Industry*, Earthscan Publications Ltd., London, UK, pg 160.

⁶⁰ Maina, pg 160.

⁶¹ Davis and McGregor, pg 52.

NGO's and in particular the relationship between NGO's and large donor organisations raise many observed problems. A study in Kenya found that there were a number of problems regarding how people interact with NGO's and NGO's with other bodies. For instance, many donor staff have admitted that a certain amount of favouritism does occur in terms of funding, admitting that things like the reputation of an organisation's leader or of an organisation itself greatly influences funding behaviour. In one case, a single organisation was receiving a quarter of a donor's total funding over two years.⁶² In Central Asia, donors tend to favour organisations with professional staff that “command English and Russian and are at ease with Western Europeans and North Americans”.⁶³

It is also a common complaint that donors, in selecting organisations to fund, focus too much on professional and urban based organisations, exhibiting a bias which may well exacerbate many of the inequalities already established in developing countries. Urban based populations tend to already experience greater political representation as well as other benefits that well funded CSO's bring. In many cases it may also add to perceived regional, social or ethnic bias. In Kenya, the bias towards Nairobi-based professional organisations excludes many popular forms of civil society, such as rural economic groups and community based organisations.⁶⁴

Favouritism and self selection by donors also leads to another observed difficulty, that of donor co-option of NGO's and other CSO's. While donors use particular criteria to select organisations to fund, the organisations, in turn, transform themselves to fit in with those criteria. While this may be seen as positive (i.e. more organisations with transparent accounting practises), it is questionable as to whether this does much to actually bolster civil society in the region in question. It has been observed, for instance, in Central Asia, that new CSO's and existing local NGO's respond “more to the priorities and interests of donor agencies rather than defining their own institutional identity.”⁶⁵ This detracts from the locally driven agenda that these organisations have the potential to address, instead, in order to receive a greater share of funding, CSO's end up representing “a patchwork of tenuously related projects such as microcredit, women's empowerment, and environment” or whatever happens to be the most fashionable cause among donor agencies, rather than causes or movements which reflect local realities and therefore have the most transformative potential. Not only does this process end up underestimating the extent of local civil society, it also runs the risk of undermining those local practises. Older forms of mass organisation,

⁶² Maina, pg 158.

⁶³ Howell and Pierce, pg 201.

⁶⁴ Maina, pg 159.

⁶⁵ Howell and Pierce, pg 199.

including “trade unions, memberships groups such as farmer's organisations... receive relatively little donor support”.⁶⁶

Bangladesh presents an interesting case study, in that country many of the problems relating to NGO's being the major node of donor funding for civil society become apparent. This is especially apparent when looking at the negative effect this has on Bangladesh's indigenous civil society. A chief reason for this is an inadequacy in the liberal conception of civil society, in that it cannot accurately predict the relationship between civil society actors and political actors in Bangladeshi society. Civil society in Bangladesh is very tied to the political life of the country and no separation between the political and civic spheres is assumed. Thus, within Bangladeshi culture, the role if NGO's, being apolitical and accountable to foreigners seems to be “alien and anachronistic”.⁶⁷ Much of the support NGO's get from donors is hampered by the fact that their activities are limited by their very organisational structure. They arouse the suspicion of elites, radicals feel they are too willing to work with hegemonic actors, conservatives distrust their apparent progressiveness, political parties distrust them because they won't entrust their loyalty. Despite the fact they don't really fit in with their donor-backed agenda, NGO's are crowding out the civil society sector, allegedly to the detriment of genuine grassroots activism.⁶⁸

Kendall Stiles maps out the ways in which NGO's have managed to create an entirely new segment of society, based around a professional class, which is centred around themselves, while at the same time alienating themselves from the rest of society. Donors emphasised the importance of 'sustainability' in the work of NGO's, and without strong links to other organisations or the private sector, NGO's set about trying to raise funds themselves. This caused resistance from the business community, a particularly damaging fact in that strong links with the business community is very important to the donor-based agenda. Particularly seeing as an eventual cordial relationship between these two aspects of society is the final goal, the role that NGO's have played in this regard risk poisoning the relationship right from the start.⁶⁹

While NGO's pursue many progressive policies, in some ways their failure to address the more standard issues that face other aspects of civil society has caused problems. For instance, while they work very hard for women's rights in a number of areas including the workforce, they seem hesitant to join with the labour unions in advocating for traditional

⁶⁶ Howell and Pierce, pg 202.

⁶⁷ Stiles, K (2002), “International Support for NGO's in Bangladesh: Some Unintended Consequences”, *World Development*, Vol. 30, No. 5, pg 840.

⁶⁸ Stiles, pg 840.

⁶⁹ Stiles, pp 840-841.

male factory workers. This causes distrust between labour unions and NGO's.⁷⁰ This kind of activity also alienates conservative groups, particularly conservative Islamist groups (of which there are a great many). While NGO's have the potential to “serve as the social glue to bind these [many and varied] actors together”⁷¹, they tend to antagonise and alienate themselves from these organisations and movements.

The structure of the relationship between NGO's and donors adds to the separation between NGO's and the communities they serve. While projects are often delegated out to NGO's from the developed world, these NGO's also delegate to local NGO's, for their perceived 'closeness' to the community in question.⁷² An observation has been made that, in Ghana at least, many of these local NGO's use their position of power and trust to maintain their status as 'wardens' of a particular constituency of villages. Assumedly, this is for organisational ends rather than for project-related ends. Sometimes, these organisations can exhibit patronising attitudes towards the local villages they claim to represent, but know they are “beyond reproach”.⁷³

The emphasis on funding NGO's is the result of the theoretical genesis behind the good governance agenda for civil society. They encapsulate what is meant by civil society in the eyes of international donors. Unfortunately, while they do a lot that is good in their development related activities, their existence introduces a number of negative externalities that hamper their effectiveness in the realm of good governance, and in some cases make their actions harmful rather than positive or even neutral. It is obvious why donors have given NGO's pride of place in terms of good governance funding, in looking for appropriate civil society ‘qualities’, many parts of the developing world were found wanting. This section has highlighted some of the reasons why funding the expansion of such a separate NGO “class” may not be such a good idea in terms of the wider goals of strengthening civil society, and its transformative potential in society.

⁷⁰ Stiles, pp841-842.

⁷¹ Stiles, pg 842.

⁷² Mohan, pg 143.

⁷³ Mohan, pg 143.

3.3 Adaptive Prescription

Though the main body of this chapter has put forward a critical view of civil society funding in the developing world, arguing for the most part that it is an erroneous aim to transfer the lessons of Western political development to areas like Sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia, it is not necessary to conclude that the idea of civil society has absolutely no merit in these parts of the world at all. The idea is rather that the particular liberal conception of civil society discussed in the first chapter which is used to justify the actions of bilateral and multilateral donors (and which leads to an NGO bias in funding patterns) lacks the potential to fully grasp the entire civil society picture in the developing world.

In many parts of the developing world, for instance, civil society has had a long history. Latin America is a prime example of this. Some historians have traced the current pro-democracy groups which are very prevalent in Latin America to anti-colonial movements in the early nineteenth century.⁷⁴ In Sub-Saharan Africa, the colonial period also saw a growth in civil society, albeit limited. Much of this was racially segregated, for instance white farmers oversaw the creation of interest groups based around their industry. Social movements also grew up in opposition to colonialism. As Jude Howell and Jenny Pierce state: “In the absence of oppositional political parties resistance to colonial rule developed on an intricate web of formal and non-formal institutions.”⁷⁵ These included labour unions, professional associations and independent churches and schools, but also resistance emerged through ethnic and tribal lines. The Mau-Mau struggle in Kenya is an example of this, but also community based institutions such as burial societies played a huge part in the struggle against colonialism.

This picture adds up to what might be called 'indigenous civil society'. These groups, traditions and movements better reflect the kinds of issues and protocol that are important to people on the ground. In this way they are different from the kinds of NGO's that often receive the lion's share of donor funding, and are tied to outside agendas.

The liberal conception of civil society ignores key facts about many parts of the developing world. This includes the historical legacy of colonialism, and also organisations which bear little resemblance to western civil society organisations. Such organisations may centre on kin, ethnicity or local traditions, and thus do not live up to the associational ideal prevalent in the civil society literature. At the same time, it is probably a mistake to claim that the idea of civil society has no relevance at all. As has been seen, there are many various forms of

⁷⁴ Howell and Pierce, pg 205.

⁷⁵ Howell and Pierce, pg 180.

indigenous civil society scattered throughout the world that may not meet a western liberal ideal, but are still important nonetheless.

David Lewis, while mapping out differing approaches to the problem of civil society in the developing world, puts forward the idea of “adaptive prescription”. After discussing the problems associated with the “Prescriptive Universalism” (an optimistic liberal conception) and “Western Exceptionalism” (The idea that civil society has no meaning outside its Western origin) points of view, he finds the Adaptive Prescription approach to be a third way option. Regarding the key tenets of the approach, Lewis finds various examples of conciliatory thinking. Included in this is Maina's study of civil society in Kenya, and his conclusion that the view of civil society needs to be expanded to include institutions that make more sense within that country's cultural context. In particular, there needs to be a movement away from a “Western preoccupation with rights and advocacy to include self help groups that are organised for personal, economic ends”,⁷⁶ specifically referring to rural farmers co-operatives and other forms of mutual economic assistance. This civil society activity, while not inherently based upon holding the state to account or providing a training ground for democratic behaviour, focuses on a “mistrust of state and overcoming civic apathy” and it is a realm where independent political leadership may emerge.⁷⁷

It is unnecessary to limit civil society to a “narrowly defined institutional arena”.⁷⁸ Why couldn't clan based or kinship groups, while protecting their interests, not hold the government to account in certain important ways? It becomes very difficult to generalise about what could institute civil society in differing cultural contexts, as Michael Edwards states: “many membership associations are not very civil, while many non-membership bodies play a central civic role”. Also, “certain things may be desirable in a “good” civil society organisation (like independence from government or corporate finance, or clear downward accountability procedures), but they are expressed differently according to culture and context”.⁷⁹ It is important, Edwards argues, to see civil society as a contested domain, incorporating aspects of the market and government, not one which works towards the same end and is defined by its separation from other aspects of society.

Edwards also points out the importance of a more contextual understanding of civil society in terms of social capital creation. Preferring to label it 'social energy' to take away its more

⁷⁶ Lewis, D (2001) *Civil Society in non-Western Contexts: Reflections on the 'Usefulness' of a Concept*, Civil Society Working Paper 13, LSE Civil Society Working Paper Series, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/publications/cswp/cswp13_abstract.htm>, pg 8.

⁷⁷ Lewis, pg 8.

⁷⁸ Lewis, pp 8-9.

⁷⁹ Edwards, M (1998) *Nailing the Jelly to the Wall: NGO's, Civil Society and International Development*, Edwards Associates, London, UK, pg 7.

economic connotations, he claims that community groups and other civil society institutions are important nodes of this, although it must be understood that civil society alone cannot (many CSO's are exclusionary and many foster undemocratic practices) what is important is what each institution does, not what it is.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Edwards (1998), pg 6.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has approached the critical analyses of the good governance agenda for civil society in the developing world, particularly its most visible area, NGO's. It has looked at some of the key arguments against the current enthusiasm for civil society as a theoretical cure-all for observed governance problems. It has potentially destabilising effects on already strained states, and the way it has been implemented has led to many unfortunate externalities. The way civil society funding has been approached, and the theoretical grounding for this approach, are both part of the same problem. The liberal bias in the literature which has been adopted by international donors does not account for the kind of indigenous forms of civil society that make the most sense in a local context. With the idea of 'adaptive prescription' framing it, this chapter has looked at some of the negative externalities of civil society funding (which in most cases translates to the funding of NGO's) and the way in which this creates a 'separate class' of NGO's often urban based, competing for donor money, but which may in fact be diverting attention from genuine grassroots movements and indigenous forms of civil society. It has argued for the need to expand our horizons regarding civil society to take in institutions and organisations that while they do not fit in with a strict reading of liberal theory, could be regarded as useful in effecting change in the developing world.

The next chapter will focus singularly on Samoa as a case study. It is a developing nation where the 'good governance' agenda is alive and well, promoted by bilateral donors and international NGO's. The main focus in the chapter, however, will be the key institution of indigenous civil society, known as the fa'asamoa or "Samoan way". It is the most important provider of social capital, and arena for the political life of Samoan communities.

Chapter Four: The Fa'asamoa and Traditional Samoan Civil Society

4.1 Introduction

The good governance agenda in the Pacific has led to support for 'civil society' narrowly conceived of in terms of its European and American origins. This chapter will dig deeper into the critical arguments around the defining of civil society by describing indigenous social practices and institutions of traditional governance. It will return, in the most part, to the key aspect of civil society, that of social capital creation, and discuss the issue of social capital, particularly identified forms of social capital that arise out of traditional practice. It will focus on Samoa as an example although many of the kinds of beliefs and social structures explained also exist in other parts of the South Pacific.

When discussing these traditional social structures as a stand in for civil society, it is worth remembering that civil society is a contested topic, as discussed in chapter two. In many ways, in as much as an institution such as the fa'asamoa is an important source of social capital as will be argued below, it also instils values that many authors associate with the 'good society' identified by Michael Edwards as one of the theoretical nodes from which the idea of civil society has come about.

The last part of the chapter will also look into some pertinent aspects of Pacific thought to provide the institution of the fa'asamoa with more colour. It is important to look at these normative aspects in order to gain a better understanding of the institution.

4.2 Samoa, the Pacific and Governance Aid

Samoa is a largely agrarian society, with just under 200,000 people. The majority of the population engage in subsistence farming. There are two main islands, Upolu and Savai'i. The total land area is just less than 3,000 square kilometres. Apia (on Upolu) is the capital and the biggest urban centre, but most people live in the villages. Samoa gained its independence in 1962 from New Zealand. It had also previously been a German colony. From 2005 data, Samoa ranked 77th on the Human Development Index,⁸¹ ahead of other South Pacific nations (Fiji was 92nd). Politically, Samoa also performs better in various indices. Freedom House rates Samoa as a 'free' country,⁸² although it came 57th out of 180 in Transparency International's 2007 Corruption Perceptions Index.⁸³ International aid, along with remittances, is a big part of the Samoan economy, and the governance agenda is alive and well in Samoa.

In the South Pacific, the major bilateral aid donors are the governments of New Zealand and Australia. The respective aid agencies of these countries, the New Zealand Agency for International Development (NZAID) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) both subscribe to the good governance agenda for civil society. For both agencies, building civil society is one of the key tenets of their governance programmes. The Australian assistance for improved governance policy framework includes “developing civil society”⁸⁴ as one of its five key areas, and NZAID's Pacific Programme for Strengthening Governance (PPSG) has as some of its current core objectives to: “strengthen organisational capacity of civil society organisations at local, national and regional levels ...” and to “improve the enabling environment for civil society in Pacific countries ...”.⁸⁵

During the rise of the governance agenda, the number of NGO's in the Pacific, as well as the number of outside NGO's working in the Pacific has risen quickly. There is now an umbrella organisation known as the Pacific Islands Association of Non Governmental Organisations (PIANGO). Formed in 1991, PIANGO works to facilitate a collective voice on issues, and

⁸¹ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Reports*, <<http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>> accessed 25/9/2008.

⁸² Freedom House, *Map of Freedom in the World*, <<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2008>>, accessed 25/9/2008

⁸³ Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2007*, <http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi/2007>, accessed 25/9/2008.

⁸⁴ AusAID, *Governance* <<http://www.ausaid.gov.au/keyaid/gover.cfm>>, accessed 23/9/2008.

⁸⁵ NZAID, *Pacific Programme for Strengthening Governance: Strategic Framework 2006-2008*, Pg 3.

help facilitate networking and shared learning among NGO's.⁸⁶ Both NZAID and AUSAID fund PIANGO reasonably heavily, recently, a joint press statement confirmed that collectively they were granting PIANGO a combined total of FJD \$4.87m to fund its activities over the next three years.⁸⁷ Within Samoa, there is also the Samoan Umbrella of Non-Governmental Organisations (SUNGO). As of 2007, there were 98 NGO's on SUNGO's membership list.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ PIANGO (2007) *PIANGO Constitution*, <http://www.piango.org/docs/About/PIANGO_Constitution_Book.pdf> accessed 23/09/2008.

⁸⁷ Joint Press Statement (NZAID and AusAID), *NZ, Australia Fund PIANGO Activities in the Region*, Scoop Independent News, 9/06/2008, <<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO0806/S00081.htm>> accessed 9/06/2008.

⁸⁸ PIANGO, *National Liason Unit for Samoa*, <<http://www.piango.org/nlu/samoa.html>> accessed 28/09/2008

4.3 The Fa'asamoa

Traditional institutions such as the fa'asamoa can be seen as civil society. Although it stands in apparent paradox to the liberal Western conception of what civil society is, in terms of its bias towards voluntary associational organisations (a bias which arises out of western political experience and development), institutions such as the fa'asamoa can be seen to instil essential values which are ascribed only to voluntary associational organisations in the literature which follows the western liberal tradition. This section will give an overview of the fa'asamoa as a concept, followed in the next section by an exploration of its value as a part of civil society and as a node of social capital. The aim is to explore an institution that a strict reading of western literature would ignore in terms of its value as a part of civil society, yet which as will be shown, may have a positive impact on many areas attributed to civil society and on the stock of social capital which may be drawn upon.

The fa'asamoa literally means “The Samoan Way”. It could variably indicate Samoan custom, tradition, or culture. “The fa'asamoa is literally the Samoan way of doing things and refers to traditional practices, customary behaviour and mutual assistance in the village context and beyond. The fa'asamoa is both a social structure, organising the shape of the community, and a set of cultural processes and protocols that determine the pattern of village activity”.⁸⁹

The difficulty of translating the term directly in to English is made apparent when it is used as a noun, and adjective and a verb all at once. It is in essence an umbrella term for a lot of concepts, and many of the major aspects of the fa'asamoa can be extracted and discussed. In general, as quoted above, it is both the description of a social structure, and an ascriptive set of protocols.

Focusing first on the latter, the fa'asamoa ascribes patterns of behaviour to members of the nu'u (village) which is the primary focal point of Samoan society. Embedded in the term are many concepts, such as respect for elders and particular obligations to family, community and church, which are expected to be adhered to.

It has been remarked upon that the strength with which the fa'asamoa pervades day to day life varies in different parts of Samoa. In the urban centres such as Apia, people have in general adapted to a more westernised and urbanised lifestyle. Although aspects of the fa'asamoa remain, the obligations attached to it are less apparent than they are in the rural

⁸⁹ Swain, P (1999) *Civil Society and Development: Pacific Island Case Studies*, PhD Thesis, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand, pg 79.

areas where traditional behaviours, obligations and social sanctions remain strong. It can be said that the fa'asamoa in rural areas is “more like the fa'asamoa of days gone by”.⁹⁰

An important aspect of the fa'asamoa is the idea of respect (fa'aaloalo). Everyone has an obligation to provide utmost respect to their peers, but especially their elders and superiors. The term fa'aaloalo specifically refers to “listening to the dictates and, in response, rendering them humble service”.⁹¹

Within the fa'asamoa, obligations such as this are enforced in various ways. Sometimes, physical punishment can be used in order to maintain discipline. It is important to note that obligations and punishment also apply to the Matai, or head of a family. The actions of the Matai are ruled by the fono, or village council. If they step too far out of line, then even Matai can expect punishment. In fact, punishments are more comprehensive to wayward Matai. Sometimes it can go to extremes such as in September 1993 in the village of Lona, when Nu'utai Mafulu was executed after refusing to “abide by certain protocols and regulations of his village” and he “refused to contribute to village affairs, [and] resisted council decision...”.⁹²

Obviously, this sort of thing is quite extreme and is liable only to happen in the more remote rural areas, but it does demonstrate the power of local tradition over people's lives, particularly in these areas. It demonstrates the high importance that people ascribe to traditional obligations and respect for those obligations, whether it is the general respect that members of the village are supposed to exhibit, or the service, and respect for village institutions that the village leaders are supposed to demonstrate.

There are other social rituals and protocols that form a big part of Samoan lives, and an important part of the fa'asamoa. These traditions, while serving specific purposes also add to the 'social glue' which connects people within the village. For instance, the evening prayer curfew, a short time in the early evening (signalled by a bell or conch shell) when people do not move in or out of the village, or the various protocols while inside fale (houses) are examples of this.

As stated above, the fa'asamoa is also descriptive, in that it is a name given to a certain set of social practices which govern village life in Samoa, and also have ramifications for national governance. This governance system, based on the person of the Matai is also known as fa'amatai. Within it, social roles are well defined, although internal democratic principles like that described below still prevail. The Nu'u, being the focal point of Samoan society, is

⁹⁰ Swain, pg 90.

⁹¹ Iati Iati, (2000) “The Good Governance Agenda for Civil Society: Implications for the Fa'aSamoa” in *Governance in Samoa: Pulega I Samoa*, Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, Suva, Fiji, pg 74.

⁹² Iati Iati, pg 74.

also the focal point of governance and authority. The Nu'u is made up of Aiga, or extended family groups, which are typically large compared to western nuclear families. Each family has a leader, or Matai. The Matai have an authoritative position in the village, and ultimately most authority is given to the council (or fonofono) of village Matai. Other institutions exist, such as the 'womans council' (Faletua ma Tausi), and the council of untitled men (Aumaga) which all have church and village responsibilities. The concept of Matai is slightly different from a more simplified understanding of a chief. Although they must have the 'requisite genealogy' to be the leader of their family, there are other aspects taken into consideration. A Matai must have demonstrated leadership and wisdom, and must have served both their families and the village in some way. A Matai is not simply the most senior male member of a particular family line. There are two types of Matai. The Ali'i or 'sitting chiefs', and the Tulafale (talking chiefs or orators) who among other things are the voice of their Ali'i at ceremonial occasions. The title Matai is not necessarily the description of a person, a Matai is neither male or female. It is a separate entity. A Matai is an "heir who has been elected to the *matai* title of an *aiga* by all heirs of the *matai* tile."⁹³

Although the fa'asamoa denotes certain practises and titles, it is important to remember that it is anything but an unchanging entity. Rather, the fa'asamoa could be seen as something that is always changing and adapting to new ideas and situations. The most obvious example of this found in history is the adaption to Christian beliefs and value systems that accompanied the work of the missionaries in the nineteenth century. Samoa is now a strongly Christian society, and while the fa'asamoa resembles what came before, it is very different. Malama Meleisea wrote that the introduction of Christianity had a 'levelling effect' on the power structure within the fa'asamoa by "removing the justification for attributing great powers to a few great chiefs... Without the ideological justification of bloodlines which linked men and women to gods, the criteria of succession became more complicated in relation to the highest ranking titles".⁹⁴ Therefore it redefined chiefly power as secular, thus allowing more people to obtain high ranks. This point is an important one to keep in mind when discussing how the fa'asamoa might relate to civil society or good governance aims. Like other social systems it has the capacity to change and redefine itself in light of new pressures while still maintaining its core character and principles.

Different aspects of the fa'asamoa system, including some of the normative tenets that the system is based on will be discussed below. The next part of this chapter will look at the

⁹³ Le Tagaloa, Aiono Dr. Fanaafi (1992) "The Samoan Culture and Government" in Crocombe, R, Uentabo, N, Ravuvu, A, Vom Busch, W, (eds) *Culture and Democracy in the South Pacific*, Institute of Pacific Studies; University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, pg 120.

⁹⁴ Meleisea, M (1988) *Change and Adaptions in Western Samoa*, Macmillan Brown Centre for Pacific Studies, Christchurch, NZ, pg 22.

ways in which the fa'asamoa can be seen as a part of civil society, and a key provider of social capital, in order to support the argument that it should not be overlooked in good governance agendas that aim to 'build' social capital.

4.4 The Fa'asamoa as Civil Society and Social Capital

Asked what the fa'asamoa meant in terms of knowledge of who you are and where you fit in, a senior orator (talking chief) claimed, when speaking of a situation in which someone has hit another person in their car and is confronted with that persons relatives: “But once you know these things, then you say: 'How about spare me for a few minutes. I come from... 'Then you mention where you come from, then you mention those things, once you mention Malietoa (chiefly title) ... People will stand up and say: 'If it was without that, we would kill you.' But now it is finished, thank you very much. Quite safe.”⁹⁵

In the above anecdote, the power of the ties that bind people together in Samoa are demonstrated, as well as the importance people place in those ties as a means of showing empathy to and trusting one another. It is an example of the benefits people derive from the social structure, whether it be the easily identifiable kinship ties, or the knowledge of ones place relative to others in society. These ties could be called 'affective ties'. Iati Iati describes the fa'asamoa as a system “strongly rooted upon affective ties”, which can be “defined as ties based on notions of kin, culture, ethnicity and others of a similar nature.”⁹⁶

Iati Iati writes about the fa'asamoa in relation to the good governance agenda for civil society. His description of the fa'asamoa as based on affective ties, which uphold and are created by the 'social cage' of the fa'amatai system stands in direct contrast, he argues, with proponents of a liberal view of civil society. The idea of affective ties and social cages are an anathema to liberal theorists, Iati Iati argues, who believe that such bonds are not helpful in terms of creating the right kind of democratic culture, that it does not represent the 'right' kind of social capital, or the 'right' kind of civil society. Iati Iati quotes Ernest Gellner in claiming that civil society should not include these “‘segmentary communities, cousin-ridden and ritual ridden' that although may be free of central tyranny, were not free of a 'demanding culture that modern man would find intolerably stifling.”⁹⁷

It is certainly true that many aspects of the fa'asamoa are inimical to commonly held conceptions of democratic practice, these range from institutionalised aspects of the

⁹⁵ Swain, pg 86.

⁹⁶ Iati Iati, pg 67.

⁹⁷ Iati Iati, pg 70.

fa'asamoa that do not fit well with democratic theory, to experienced difficulties that have existed since the two systems have been forced to work alongside the other since the end of the colonial era.

One of the things identified with the poor record of governance in the Pacific is the inability of executive governments to establish a good working relationship with civil society.⁹⁸ That, in turn, leads to little accountability being demanded of the government, and added to associated democratic woes. Elise Huffer and Asofou So'o note the same thing in reference to the fa'asamoa. The interaction between the traditional forms of practice associated with fa'asamoa and fa'amatai and the executive government based on a liberal democratic (and bureaucratic) model has been less than perfect.⁹⁹ They name discrimination, misunderstanding and malpractice among the resultant effects of this incomplete relationship.

It is important to point out, while making the claim that the fa'asamoa is an important node of social capital and the good things that can flow from this in terms of democratic culture, that not all aspects of the fa'asamoa are 'good' or desired from a democratic point of view. This is obvious when looking at the provision for physical punishment, for instance, or the seemingly quite strict ascribed social roles. As the above has pointed out, the interaction between the fa'asamoa and the more western, democratic institutions of the central Samoan government has been, at times, fraught with difficulties.

One issue in particular is that regarding gender and positions of authority. Although there is nothing in particular preventing females from attaining the rank of Matai, in practise it rarely occurs. The rank itself does not denote an individual (the rank belongs to the title), and it has no gender. But, as Stephanie Lawson points out, "ideal descriptions of socio-political structures... rarely coincide with reality."¹⁰⁰ Historically, as in other societies, instances of women attaining chiefly title have been rare.¹⁰¹

These facts indicate that the fa'asamoa in many areas fails to embody democratic principles and that there are a number of reasons why observers would hesitate to include it among a list of civil society institutions. It could also be argued that with social ties bound up in kinship groups and held together with strict patterns of ritual and authority, the 'right' kind of social capital is not being created to facilitate a democratic culture on a national scale. It is

⁹⁸ Saldanha, C (2004) "Strategies for Good Governance in the Pacific", *Asian Pacific Economic Literature*, Vol. 18, No. 2, pg 33.

⁹⁹ Huffer, E and So'o, A (2005) "Beyond Governance in Samoa: Understanding Samoan Political Thought", *The Contemporary Pacific*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, USA, pg 311.

¹⁰⁰ Lawson, S (1996) *Tradition Versus Democracy in the South Pacific*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, pg 123.

¹⁰¹ Lawson, pg 123.

certainly not the kind of civil society or social capital that Robert Putnam wrote about.

The fa'asamoa is not the same as civil society as seen through 'neo-toquevillian' eyes, that of dense civic associationalism. In a certain sense, the fa'asamoa could be seen as a vision of the 'good society' identified by Michael Edwards, in that it is an 'ideal type' of society where "tolerance, non-discrimination, non-violence, trust and cooperation are common denominators, along with freedom and democracy so long as these are not defined exclusively in western terms".¹⁰² Certainly there are strong elements of democratic practice within the fa'asamoa, notably the often healthy democratic basis upon which Matai titles are chosen within the aiga. As stated above, this ideal system is often not borne out in practice (as aren't many democratic ideals even in western democracies), but the ideal exists as the basis of the institution.

At the basis of the fa'asamoa are many key institutions which afford the fa'asamoa with much that is seen as essential to the role of civil society, even in the liberal tradition. The open settings in which discussion occurs and key decisions are made align with its role in interest aggregation and articulation. Publicity, or the public way in which discussions are held and debated is a key aspect of the fa'asamoa. Even the distribution of goods is a public act.¹⁰³

The public ways in which things are handled have often been remarked upon. As have the levels of transparency and accountability inherent within the system. Maulolo Leaula Tavita, for instance, praises the openness at the heart of the fa'asamoa, "Good governance is the heart of the 'fa'asamoa' (culture), transparency and accountability in the Samoan concept are pillars that play a critical part in the stability of Samoa.... All issues are brought before the village and discussed in the open for everyone to hear and also to comment on",¹⁰⁴ including chiefs, untitled men, and women. Accountability, in terms of village affairs is built into this ideal system, and civility and consensus are important precepts. There are many ways in which the fa'asamoa can be seen as an ideal type of a 'civil' society, aspects which have their origin not least in the fact of Samoa's size and isolation. These facts make it vital that the distribution of resources, for instance, is a publicly accountable act.

Another very important point regarding the fa'asamoa as civil society lies in past successes in implementing governance strategies for particular issues. There have been past examples, where elements of the fa'amatai system were successfully utilised to effect change in the governance of health provision to the villages, acting as an important civil society partner,

¹⁰² Edwards (2004), pp 38-39.

¹⁰³ Huffer and So'o, pg 325.

¹⁰⁴ Sioa, P, 29/5/2008, "Local Governance More Open Says Maulolo", *Samoa News Line* <<http://www.samoalivenews.com/Culture-and-Society/Local-Governance-More-Open-Says-Maulolo.html>> accessed 28/9/2008.

with governance and service delivery roles. Iesu Kuresa was appointed by the New Zealand Health Services in the 1920's to oversee the creation of the Health and Sanitation Programme for the villages.¹⁰⁵ He based the project on the faletua ma tausī and tamaiti, existing groups within the fa'asamoa structure (meaning the wives of matai, and children). The results led to an effective and sustainable programme that lasted for forty years. It looked after the "sanitation and beautification of Samoan villages and the health and welfare of mothers, infants and the whole community".¹⁰⁶ It was from this base that the National Council of Women grew. This is also a good example, like that stated above; of how the fa'amatai system is not adverse to change, and can accommodate new ideas and practices.

In terms of social capital, the basis upon which liberal detractors might complain about the way the fa'asamoa works is also value laden. As has already been shown, social capital is as a contested topic as civil society. Although Samoan social institutions might be, as Gellner says, 'cousin-ridden', meaning too dependant on kinship ties, they are not more cousin ridden than James Coleman's description of diamond traders in New York. In that situation, familial ties enabled the enormous amounts of trust that was required for the effective running of the market and the information flows that the individuals required. Samoa is such a small polity it is hard to imagine people trying to ignore the social effect that kinship ties have, and the social capital generated from these ties is no less important. Speaking about remittances, Iati Iati notes that the 'emotional and social foundations' that this system is based on, which are in turn centred on affective ties, are ways in which Samoans may 'elicit assistance' through kinship ties.¹⁰⁷ Using a context-dependant approach as in the work of James Coleman, it is easy to see how access to various forms of social capital permeates the fa'asamoa and the affective ties upon which it is based. The structured networks based on affective ties, assigned roles, and obligations provide a context within which individuals find social support, assistance, and a platform from which to assess specific issues and pursue agendas. Although the basis of the ties that bind the networks together are different, the networks themselves are very present.

Speaking of crucial differences between Samoan and Western forms of social capital, Rochelle Stewart-Withers and Anthony O' Brian remarked that membership in social capital networks in Samoa is 'obligation-driven and conceptual rather than rule driven and specific, such as occurs in western democracies'.¹⁰⁸ This may well be the major difference. From a liberal point of view social capital may seem limited in Samoa because it is unrecognisable.

¹⁰⁵ Le Tagaloa, pg 124.

¹⁰⁶ Le Tagaloa, pg 124.

¹⁰⁷ Iati Iati, pg 73.

¹⁰⁸ Stewart-Withers, R, and O' Brian, A (2006) "Suicide prevention and Social Capital: A Samoan Perspective", *Health Sociology Review*, Vol. 15, Iss. 2, pg 216.

It must be looked at within the context of Samoan society, and the benefits that membership within the fa'asamoa system bring come to the fore. Then it is possible to see why such remarkable levels of trust and reciprocity exist within the system such as was apparent in the anecdote at the beginning of this section. Reciprocity, in particular, is a very important element of the fa'asamoa. Its importance is seen to derive from both Samoan cultural tradition and Christian value systems.¹⁰⁹ Although slightly more formalised than the kind of reciprocity Putnam described and felt was such an important aspect of social capital, it shares much that is similar. On who is rendered a favour (i.e. a service or a gift) “takes on a responsibility to repay it in the future. The exact debt incurred is unspecified and neither the form nor the amount of the repayment is specified at the time it is incurred”.¹¹⁰ This bears close resemblance to Putnam's idea of 'generalised reciprocity', i.e. the sense that one good turn deserves another. This was key to his vision of a society strong in social capital.

The trust generated within the structure of the fa'asamoa is, as stated above, obligation driven rather than rule driven, making it different to that form of trust described by Putnam. Kenneth Newton describes this type of trust as “thick” trust. It is common to many small “face to face” communities. It is also common in societies with more 'direct' forms of political participation, such as the fa'asamoa, largely generated by day to day contact.¹¹¹

Some of the benefits afforded to individuals within the fa'asamoa structure become apparent when focusing on the fact that the fa'asamoa has strongly recreated itself in the major nodes of Samoan immigration. An example of this is the fa'a Aukilani (the Auckland way), a variant on the fa'asamoa structure that has developed among immigrant Samoan families in Auckland. This structure has been described as more 'liberal' than that in Samoa as it has had to establish itself within the context of another overarching culture. Melani Anae quotes an island-born Matai now living in New Zealand saying: “They [our parents] were bought up in the fa'asamoa but they also looked at the western ways and they adapted their lifestyles... we picked up the stuff that was suitable for us so we still have the traditional fa'aSamoa upbringing but we were also exposed to the fa'aPalagi...”¹¹² Despite this, the fundamental elements of the fa'asamoa remain, with kinship ties remaining very important. The kinship ties and the social capital derived from those ties become strongly apparent in the context of Samoan individuals who emigrate to Auckland or California and find a familiar social

¹⁰⁹ Macpherson, C, Macpherson, L, (2000) “Where Theory Meets Practice: The Limits of the Good Governance Programme”, in *Governance in Samoa: Pulega I Samoa*, Institute of Pacific Studies, USP, Suva, Fiji, pg 31.

¹¹⁰ Macpherson, C, Macpherson, L, pg 31.

¹¹¹ Newton, pg 228.

¹¹² Anae, M (2002) “Papalagi Redefined: Toward a New Zealand-Born Samoan Identity” in Spickard, P, Rondilla, J.L, and Hippolite Write, D. (eds), *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, USA, pg 153.

structure waiting for them and all the advantages that come with that. For newly arrived migrants in an international urban setting, the “Samoan cultural system provides a framework for interpreting urban life and organizing social relations.”¹¹³ This occurs in much the same way as immigrant communities around the world recreate social structures in alien cultures (such as the many 'Chinatowns' in cities around the world) which include social capital networks that help newly arrived immigrants on social and economic levels, as well as acting as a 'transition' point between the two cultures.

Samoans, through their shared cultural experience within the system known as fa'asamoa, share strong social capital networks. The 'affective ties' that this system is based on, allow Samoans to elicit assistance from one another and gain support from a strong social bedrock. On top of this, it has been seen in this section that a strong sense of interpersonal trust is prevalent within the fa'asamoa (as demonstrated by the anecdote given at the beginning of this section) and an obligation-driven senses of trust and reciprocity. Both of these norms were identified in the first chapter as critically important, in Robert Putnam's view, to a society with high levels of social capital. Yet what is perhaps more important is the strong community organisation, based on civility and openness, which provides a very strong social network. The fa'asamoa is not a voluntary organisation, and the norms that it creates are not exactly the same as those described by Putnam. The fa'asamoa is based on affective ties, and its norms are obligation driven. Even so, seeing it as a dense social network allows us to see these norms for what they are, as a strong form of social capital. The next section will look at some of the normative concepts and values behind the fa'asamoa.

¹¹³ Janes, C. R (2002) “From Village to City: Samoan Migration to California” in Spickard, P, Rondilla, J.L, and Hippolite Write, D. (eds), *Pacific Diaspora: Island Peoples in the United States and Across the Pacific*, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, USA, pg 126.

4.5 Pacific Thought

Although much has been written about the fa'asamoa, most of it has been to do with how it reacts with various modern institutions. Not very much attention has been paid to the principles which underlie the fa'asamoa. These are important in much the same way as liberal theory is in describing the ideal roles of civil society and social capital in adding to the democratic life of a polity. Recently, a small body of work has emerged which is concerned with Pacific thought, and the underlying principles behind traditional Pacific institutions. This kind of investigation goes hand in hand with an approach looking at 'indigenous epistemologies', or trying to trace indigenous ways of thought or to identify an indigenous dialogue on issues such as development. Academic investigation in this area is occurring across the pacific in many different countries. Largely, over the last thirty years, most of the literature in this area has been exploring the relationship between Pacific thought and introduced religion, namely, Christianity. Although there exist parallels between the two systems of thought, "they mainly show that... Christianity cannot survive without integrating existing fundamental values of local societies".¹¹⁴ This is not the only area they explore, however. At times the subject of social capital has been approached. In Fiji, Ropate Qalo studied the concept of Vaka Viti, a concept similar to fa'asamoa, it means "the 'Fijian Way' or Fijian rationality... as it is understood by ethnic Fijians"¹¹⁵ and the ways in which it can be seen as social capital. In his exploration, Qalo makes no value judgement based on a 'type' of social capital. In fact, he warns against this kind of separation, stating: "Our Pacific social capital is being foolishly, naively or arrogantly ignored or have been pushed aside in our present life-world because of a lack of a meaningful appreciation of our own civilization." This suggests that the 'individualist' aspect of western culture, including the particular notion of social capital and civil society based around associationalism, is seen as a threat to traditional forms of social capital in the Pacific. Qalo goes on to say: "Basically, in my view, the friendliness in the islands, the respect for elders, the sea, the woods or nature and kinship, emanate from a natural attitude peculiar to our life-world then and now, but slowly it is being eroded through individualism. Fellow islanders will recognize similar patterns and trends in their own islands as in the *Fa'a Samoa*, *Wantokism*, *Faka Niue*, *I Kiribati* and so on".

¹¹⁴ Huffer, E and Qalo, R (2004) "Have We Been Thinking Upside Down? The Contemporary Emergence of Pacific Theoretical Thought", *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pg 87.

¹¹⁵ Qalo, R (1998) *Vaka Viti: If it is Social Capital then we are more advanced than we realize*, Paper delivered at the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture Seminar Series at the University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji, 14 October.

This suggests that the values inherent in the Vaka-Viti and other Pacific thought-systems including the fa'asamoa are less individualist than western ones, but that they themselves constitute important social-capital networks. It also suggests that these important social capital networks are under threat from western ways of being and are being currently, largely ignored. This includes the major development donors, and their civil society strategies for social capital building and good governance.

But what are the underlying elements of the fa'asamoa that are the basis of the system itself?

As stated above, reciprocity is a key element of the fa'asamoa, both as an obligation-driven part of everyday social custom, but also at a deeper normative level. The term fa'alaolao (respect) literally refers to “two people facing each other in a soothing relationship, [and it] implies a balance and reciprocity between all (traditional) political entities engaging with each other.”¹¹⁶ Along with the concepts of Mamalu (dignity) and Alofa (compassion, and love), it upholds many traditional institutions such as feagaiga, the respectful relationship between brother and sister, but which also has referred to the relationship between the political aspects of traditional Samoan society, in particular the councils (fono) with decision making power.

It is important also to make a note of the inherent egalitarianism of Samoan society. It could be said that in systems where kinship structures are so important, they are necessarily hierarchically ordered, without much room for individual movement within that structure. The first point here is that Matai are accorded the same respect, and that every Aiga has a Matai. Therefore every Aiga group has the same respect and representation. As has already been stated, Matai titles are open to all members of the Aiga, with service to the Aiga being the main pre-requisite. It is also true that there is no class distinction, and that in “classificatory terminology” everyone is either the 'son' or 'daughter' of a chief, which means that “no member of an aiga is expected to defer to a member of another aiga, even when that other is of higher status”.¹¹⁷ Huffer and So'o also point out that the institutions of liberal democracy developed in societies that were riven with class inequalities, and those institutions were designed to break those apart (e.g universal suffrage), whereas the Samoan context is very different. What was essentially an egalitarian society developed institutions with different purposes in mind, when universal suffrage came to Samoa, it brought with it those other inequalities that are still debated in western democracies, such as wealth inequality and its effects on

¹¹⁶ Huffer and So'o, pg 322.

¹¹⁷ Huffer and So'o, pp 323-324.

political processes.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Huffer and So'o, pg 324.

4.6 Conclusion

Within the affective ties, the kinship based networks and the shared experience of cultural practice, a strong type of social capital exists within the fa'asamoa. There exist strong cultural institutions through which individual Samoans may elicit assistance from one another, and strong networks which act to bind people together. These act to create very high levels of trust and reciprocity in Samoan society. It is not just these elements however, the fa'asamoa is based on values and norms which align with its role as a fount of social capital.

Given the good governance agenda, and the important role placed on civil society as a node and a creator of social capital, it makes sense that more can be done within the structure of the fa'asamoa itself. As already noted, many of the major problems relating to governance in Samoa arise in the undefined area between modern government institutions and traditional forms of authority within the fa'asamoa as it is that authority that most people most readily understand. The difference between modern, urban NGO's and traditional nodes of community action may be seen in the same light.

The historical example above is a good demonstration of the important role that the fa'asamoa can play in Samoa's development and governance in key areas. In utilising the already existing social networks, a sustainable and successful health strategy was put in place. The fa'asamoa, because of these strong networks and values, has great potential in terms of collective action and positively affecting better governance outcomes.

Good governance donors cannot neglect the role the fa'asamoa plays in the social and political lives of Samoans. They cannot simply fund the development of a familiar form of civil society to achieve (among other things) the facilitation of social capital along certain lines. What this chapter has attempted to demonstrate, is a basis upon which donors might begin to see the fa'asamoa in a positive light as an important aspect of Samoan civil society, and the source of important social capital that is so vital to fostering good governance practices in every aspect of society.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the governance agenda for civil society is, to an extent, flawed. The theoretical genesis of the agenda draws its inspiration from culturally and historically specific values. Liberal Western theory regarding the role of civil society, its three sector approach, and its assumptions based on the observances of Alexis d'Tocqueville, Robert Putnam and theorists like him, identify current ideas about civil society within a very specific cultural frame.

Added to this is the observed effects of civil society funding on the ground. Due to political realities, CSO's must organise themselves along certain bureaucratic lines in order to gain a funding relationship with government and other accountable donors. The negative externalities of this new class of professionally organised NGO's have been observed in many parts of the developing world, including Africa, and Bangladesh.

A key problem is that this new form of civil society can be seen to undermine the state, and therefore have a destabilising effect, but also traditional practices and even traditional forms of civil society. It has been seen that NGO's often respond more to the needs of the donors rather than forge their own institutional identity, and even the proliferation of NGO's can to some extent crowd out genuine grassroots movements. While they may be fulfilling roles that liberal theory ascribes to them, they may be having actually harmful effects on a more genuine and culturally appropriate movements, networks, nodes of social capital, and ultimately, paths to better governance objectives. The 'adaptive prescription' viewpoint is the more appropriate model for viewing the relevance of civil society in the developing world. It doesn't discount the importance of civil society in achieving wider governance objectives, but realises that our view of civil society must expand beyond narrow culturally specific precepts.

Implicit within this argument is the need to reformulate ideas about civil society and social capital. The liberal conception is but one approach. We could, for instance, view the example presented in this thesis, the fa'asamoa, as an example of the 'good society', or an ideal type of society such as that theoretical avenue described by Michael Edwards. Also, much is gained by breaking apart Putnam's conception of social capital. If we discard the idea that only voluntary associative organisations can be the arena in which people learn the values important to better democratic governance, we can critically assess such forms of traditional civil society without an inherent liberal bias. It has been seen that the fa'asamoa

does in fact facilitate many of the norms that Putnam found so important including (albeit slightly altered forms of) trust and reciprocity. The norms inherent in the fa'asamoa resemble more the idea of “thick trust” as described by Kenneth Newton.

In Samoa, working with the fa'asamoa and the already existing community structure and social capital networks, is a more culturally appropriate way of achieving better governance results, than simply funding a separate NGO class to achieve such ends. It has already been pointed out that historically, such a strategy was successful when looking for leadership on village health issues. In the already existing networks of the faletua ma tausī, social resources were utilised and a successful mobilisation occurred around a common goal. This is not to say that, for instance, international NGO's do not do good work, but that lasting, sustainable and successful change is more likely working alongside already existing civil society, and already existing social capital networks.

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