

***MASANIAI: TOWARDS A RENEWED***  
**THEOLOGY OF LGBTQ+ COMMUNITIES**  
**FROM A TRANS-OCEANIC PERSPECTIVE**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

What is sin? What are morals? What is God's true image? We seek to place an analysis of these questions into our topic of homosexuality. As homosexual relationships become more widely accepted today, this work seeks to analyse how normalized thinking behind the issue affects not only the homosexual community but humanity as a whole. Traditional beliefs are being challenged while interpretations are constantly being renewed. As a result of these changing interpretations, barriers and divisions are created between people where humankind is ultimately unable, and oftentimes unwilling to relate to one another. To bridge this gap, we investigate thinking patterns and one's ever shifting thoughts. Taking into account how time evokes change, we will critique the changing beliefs, analysing how change can offer a relational living.

Using the *masaniai* hermeneutical approach, we seek to explore, identify and analyse such norms while providing a renewed way of becoming and living relationally. This together with the concept of the Samoan proverb, – “*E le o le fusiga, po'o le fisiga, a'o le niusina*” which can be translated as “Not the husk, or the de-husking, but the core of the green coconut” – we intend on exploring the normalized situation around homosexuality, peeling back forms of exclusion, while ultimately seeking the core of a renewed theology which provides a sense of God's embracing love and hope, and most importantly, a sense of relationality with all of humanity.

Looking from a trans-oceanic perspective of both American and Pacific cultures, we seek to allow dialogue to break down boundaries of exclusion and sin. Where blueprints are seen on how one is to handle the said situations in the former, there is a lack of acknowledgement seen in the latter. In an effort to provide a renewed theology for the LGBTQ+ communities, it is the hope that such research provides a sense of liberation, equality and relationality.

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that this thesis, which is 39,451 words in length (excluding the bibliography and front matter), has been written by me, that it is the result of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, in any previous written work for an academic award at this or any other academic institution.

I also declare that this thesis has not used any material, heard or read, without academically appropriate acknowledgment of the source.

Name: Craig Masaniai

Signed: Craig Masaniai

Date: November 11, 2019

## DEDICATION

*To my loving parents*

*Mafutaga & So'onafai Masaniai*

*For your endless support*

*I thank you from the depth of my heart*

*I love you both*

*and*

*To my beautiful wife*

*Avasa Vaoita Masaniai*

*For the numerous sleepless nights*

*Now we can sleep*

*I love you*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vii
List of Abbreviations	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 Research Problem and Hermeneutical Approach	4
1.1. Research Problem	5
1.1.1. Hate Crimes	6
1.1.2. Inequality	11
1.1.3. The Lack of Relationality	14
1.1.4. Why the Discrimination?	17
1.2. A Trans-Oceanic Worldview: Situating the Researcher	20
1.3. <i>Masaniai</i> Hermeneutical Approach	23
1.3.1. <i>Fusiga</i> (Husk): Using <i>masaniai</i> to Identify Domesticated Norms in Society and Church	27
1.3.2. <i>Fisiga</i> (De-husk): Towards a Christian Norm of Embrace	28
1.3.3. <i>Niusina</i> (Core of the green coconut): A Renewed Theology of LGBTQ+ Communities	29
Summary	30
Chapter 2 The Husk: Using <i>Masaniai</i> to Identify the Domesticated Norms in Society, Culture and Church	32
2.1. Meta-Ethics	33
2.2. Society/Culture	35
2.2.1. Case Studies	35
2.2.2. UN Position	41
2.2.3. Pacific Cultural View	43
2.3. Biblical/Church	46
2.3.1. Conservative/Liberal Views	49
2.4. Pacific Alternative	56
Summary	62
Chapter 3 De-husking: Towards a Christian Norm of Embrace	64
3.1. Theological Perspectives	66
3.1.1. Doctrine of Sin	66
3.1.2. Sexual Immorality	71

3.1.3. Image of God	75
3.2. Relooking the Norms in line with Theological Understandings	78
3.2.1. Boundaries	80
3.2.2. Subversive/Underlying Meanings	84
3.3. Christian Norm of Embrace	88
Summary	90
Chapter 4 <i>Niusina</i> : A Renewed Theology of LGBTQ+ Communities	92
4.1. Renewed Theology	94
4.1.1. God who embraces	95
4.1.2. God of Hope and Love	99
4.1.3. Analysis	104
4.2. Application	107
4.2.1. American Alternative	108
4.2.2. Pacific Alternative	112
Summary	115
Conclusion	118
Glossary	123
Bibliography	124

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For all those who were both mentioned and not mentioned, families, friends and churches, I pray for God's blessings on each and every one of you. *Vinaka vakalevu and Faafetai tele lava!*



## **List of Abbreviations**

<b>CCCAS</b>	Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa
<b>DADT</b>	Don't Ask, Don't Tell
<b>LGBTQ</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-sexual/Transgender, Queer
<b>PCC</b>	Pacific Council of Churches
<b>PM</b>	Prime Minister
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>US</b>	United States

## Introduction

There has long been a debate posed on the idea of homosexual relationships. Such relationships are believed to go against the natural order of creation or going against traditional beliefs and traditions. Defined as a romantic and sexual attraction for someone of the same sex, homosexuality has always been a topic of moral debate. Society has not been able to agree on whether this kind of behaviour should be accepted, nor have they even thought about what acceptance may look like.

On one hand, there are common discussions which address homosexuality as both sinful and immoral. Sherwood Cole mentions “the practice of homosexuality undermines the critical role of the family as an institution and obliterates the biblical distinctiveness of the antithetical and complementary roles of man and woman” (Cole 2000, 350). In other words, homosexuality is seen as going against what is believed to be the moral code of God. In essence, homosexuals are seen to provide an imbalance to society.

On the other hand, we see how through the evolution of time and shifting perceptions, there seems to be a new status quo, according to Suzanne Fields. Fields regards this new norm as the ‘homosexualization of culture’ or ‘the gaying of America’ (Weise 2005, 234). Referring to the media landscape of America, Fields draws on the normalization of homosexual relationships in mainstream media. Although the normalizing of homosexual relationships through media does not directly equal the acceptance of these kinds of relationships by the said media and societies, it nevertheless points to the shifting of thoughts within the US.

As such debate continues to take place within the US, the effects are being felt in the Pacific as well, more specifically within Samoa<sup>1</sup> (American Samoa and Samoa). Such effects can be seen through discrimination, inequality and oppressive behaviours expressed towards the LGBTQ+ communities. As we discuss these effects throughout the thesis, we note how despite the effects being present in Samoa, there is a lack of discussion being made towards the issue. As views of homosexuality continue to change, it remains mostly unaddressed and, in some cases, altogether avoided in Samoa. But the question is, why?

Throughout this thesis, we intend to explore the differing norms from the trans-oceanic perspective in and around the topic of homosexuality. By using the *masaniai* hermeneutical approach, we seek to identify and analyse the domesticated norms, as well as seeking new methods to appropriately address the problems of treatment towards the LGBTQ+ communities, as seen within both America as well as in Samoa. In addition to the *masaniai* hermeneutic, we will also use a coconut framework stemming from the Samoan proverb – “*E le o le fusiga, po’o le fusiga, a’o le niusina*” which can be translated as “Not the husk, or the de-husking, but the core of the green coconut” – This proverb will be used to outline our framework.

In Chapter one, we will seek to expound on the issue of homosexuality and how it is treated within the trans-oceanic contexts. We will also explore the use of the *masaniai* hermeneutical approach alongside the aforementioned Samoan proverb. Chapter two will seek to investigate the domesticated norms around homosexuality, both within the church and within society. Following suit, chapter three will review the domesticated norms

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<sup>1</sup>When referencing Samoa, it is most commonly meant to reference both American Samoa and Samoa. Despite being two separate countries, they are nevertheless influenced by the same culture. References to specifically American Samoa will only be done when attempting to differentiate between thoughts of the two countries.

together with a theological understanding, therefore providing a renewed possible foundation of belief. Such chapter will also seek to explore the boundaries seen within the different norms. Identifying these boundaries in chapter three, chapter four will feed off of the renewed foundation by seeking then to provide a renewed theology in looking at the homosexual issue.

This thesis is in no way meant to promote nor demote homosexuality, but it is the hope that at the end of this research, one is properly made aware of the issue and able to make a more relational decision towards the issue. As we embark on this work, it is my prayer that God's embracing, loving and hopeful nature exudes in us all. In so speaking, it is my prayer that God also continues to fill us with a joy of understanding and openness.

## Chapter 1

### Research Problem and Hermeneutical Approach

Life is full of binary opposites: right and wrong; left and right; black and white; good and evil; male and female; so on and so forth. Such opposites are a part of everyday life. In today's day and age, we understand that the dualist nature of binary opposites can often be broken down into more than two parts. If looking at right and wrong, compromises can often negate the two. The colours black and white cover a whole spectrum of colours between them, when mixed together they produce the colour grey. A colour that is both light and dark. When looking at the space between what is good and evil one can see that this space is a topic of its own. Similarly then, the common gender roles of male and female have also been divided into what many today regard as the 'third gender'<sup>1</sup>. This third gender in many cases is also recognized as one within the category known as the LGBTQ<sup>2</sup> – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-sexual/Transgender, Queer.

With these binary opposites being expounded on in this day and age, the same can be seen with the sexual reality of life in which Alan Brash breaks down into three groups: (1) Heterosexual relationships; (2) Heterosexual relationships that break down when someone within the relationship seeks another partner of the same sex; (3) Homosexual relationships (Brash 1995, 11). Such ways of living have become common throughout different parts of the globe – although not accepted in most parts. Brash carries on with

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<sup>1</sup> The third-gender is a concept in which individuals are categorized, either by themselves or by society, as neither man nor woman. It is also a social category present in societies that recognize three or more genders.

<sup>2</sup> Things had originally started with the LGBT but along the way, the acronym only grew larger. Today, the group actually extends to LGBTQIAPK+ which would thereby be broken down as follow: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans-sexual/Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersexual, Asexual/Aromantic/Ally, Pansexual/Polygamous, Kinks. The '+' at the end is left there to include anyone not specified within such acronym. Today, rather than using such long acronym, the LGBT+, LGBTQ or LGBTI would often provide an inclusion for all. In regards to the thesis however, the usage of LGBTQ+ will be used throughout the paper.

this statement by saying, “High, low and intermediate rates of homosexuality are found among people who live in hot or cold climates, who are rich or poor, educated or not, quite irrespective of whether they live in a Stone Age society or in an advanced civilization” (Brash 1995, 13). Whether witnessed in real life or within the media, it is evident that the LGBTQ+ communities are ever present in our daily lives.

Throughout this chapter then, we will be discussing how homosexuality and the LGBTQ+ communities have been perceived, both within the Western cultures and throughout the Pacific or what we regard here as the trans-oceanic contexts, we attempt to find the distinct problem which lies behind the LGBTQ+ communities. Before doing so, we identify how and why these contexts are being used. Looking then into both contexts, we attempt to find the normalized behaviours shaped around the LGBTQ+ communities through a few key studies. Understanding that the two contexts are very different, we look for both similarities and differences, while also seeking out how one context can learn from another in the way homosexuality is treated and regarded. In finding the reasons why LGBTQ+ communities are seeking liberation, we investigate the hermeneutical approach that will shape this thesis, while ultimately seeking liberation of the LGBTQ+ community from oppression.

### **1.1. Research Problem**

Within this section, we look into three distinct, yet interconnected ways, in which homosexuality and/or the LGBTQ+ communities have been viewed throughout the USA. Observing these problems, we attempt to make comparisons (if any) with the Pacific. Although such contexts are widely separate and radically different, the influence of the West upon the Pacific can nonetheless be seen.

Galoane Ta’ase examines these influences by looking at the changes in Samoan life and culture. For example, in terms of building, the majority of Samoa have moved away

from the open space design to the more Western design of walls. Another example Ta'ase provides is crime. Those who come and return to both Samoa and American Samoa continue to influence the drug trafficking issue. The fast food culture is also seen to have been adopted by many, leading to one's reliance on fast food rather than time with family over home cooked meals (Ta'ase 2009, 133). Despite these influences being either presumed good or bad, it is key to note here how Samoa and perhaps even parts of the Pacific are also influenced by Western culture.

Keeping these influences in mind, we can therefore say that whatever the general regard of the US and the West have towards homosexuality, will also greatly affect our Pacific Island nations in thought and belief. How can we learn from the Western cultures in the way we address the homosexual issue? How can we try to prevent discrimination from happening within the Pacific? After going about these discussions, we also ask, what are we as Pacific islanders able to offer to the Western cultures in the way that we look and address the issue of homosexuality. Such can be described as a two-way door where both American and Pacific cultures are able to learn from one another. In attempts to answer these questions, we delve first into three common issues which have caused distress upon the LGBTQ+ communities of the US, and exhibit how these problems may have arisen.

### **1.1.1. Hate Crimes**

Different from other crimes, hate crimes are associated greatly with one's unjust actions towards another due to their differences. Causing damage on another individual or their property through motivation of one's personal biases, hate crimes carry serious consequences depending on the depth of the crime. In this section, we will explore and examine the hate crimes displayed towards the homosexual or LGBTQ+ communities.

In terms of history, one of the first events that clearly showed the division between the heterosexuals and the homosexuals was during the incident at the Stonewall Inn. The Stonewall Inn was a gay bar located in New York's Greenwich Village. According to Ronald Long, a police bust was conducted for illegal sales of alcohol and during this event, up to nearly 200 people were arrested (Long 2004, 4). Although these busts during the time were quite common, arresting over 200 people, let alone 200 gay and lesbians, was not. The bust was most definitely a disguise for a hate crime against homosexuals residing in the neighbourhoods as homosexuality was still very uncommon during the time period. The events that took place at the Stonewall Inn eventually sparked an outrage by the lesbian and gay liberation movements. As a result, they rose together in their efforts for acceptance in their communities. The divisions between the 'straights'<sup>3</sup> and the 'gays' continued to persist, which was evident through the hate-crimes that occurred throughout the subsequent years.

On the 7th of October, 1998, a 'scarecrow' was hung atop a fence in the town of Laramie, Wyoming. Residents who passed by thought nothing of the scarecrow – it being the month of Halloween. It was not until Aaron Kreifels, who was strolling on his bike, decided to take a closer look and to his horror it was not a harmless Halloween decoration, but an actual human being named Matthew Shepard (Hoffman 2011, 121). Shepard was a college student at the University of Wyoming and identified himself to be of the LGBTQ+ community. It was reported that upon exiting the bar, two men lured him out, drove him to a secluded area, beat him senseless and left him to die. After being found by Kreifels, Shepard was sent to the hospital where he died a couple of days later due to serious injuries.

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<sup>3</sup> The term straight is the equivalent of those who consider themselves to be in a heterosexual relationship.



The events had been covered and broadcasted throughout National News; however, the crime was identified simply as a homicide to ensure that the crime wasn't linked to the LGBTQ+ community and thus be considered a hate crime. However, as the act was being swept under the rug, a great uproar by the LGBTQ+ communities formed to bring awareness to the issue. The ongoing issue of LGBTQ+ rights and their oppression was pushed and mended to by government officials. Settlements were eventually made and speeches by President Bill Clinton, and House Democratic Leader, Richard Gephardt, were made in order to promote a state of peace, while thereby passing the Hate Crimes Prevention Act (Hoffman 2011, 129). This act protected the LGBTQ+ communities from suffering a similar fate to Shepard. Although the passing of this act was intended to portray a sense of equality for the said community, this right of equality was not freely given by the public. The ridiculing and slandering of the LGBTQ+ communities continued, triggering divisions amongst people: those who supported LGBTQ+ rights and those who did not.

In a similar situation, we look at the third-gender of the Pacific. The third-gender here is recognized by Gilbert Herdt as “Certain individuals in certain times and places [that] transcend the categories of male and female, masculine and feminine, as these have been understood in Western culture since at least the later nineteenth century” (Herdt 1996, 21). Throughout the Pacific, many cultures have their own recognition of these third-genders within their respective contexts. For example: in Samoa we have the *fa'afafine*; Tonga have the *fakafefine*; Fiji have the *vakasalewalewa*; and Tahiti and Hawaii have the *mahu*. Although there is much to say about the third-gender and their association or categorization under the LGBTQ+ label, for the purposes of this paper and research, the third-gender are to be identified as being a part of the LGBTQ+ communities.

The *fa'afafine*, which can be translated as 'in the manner (way) of a woman' are very much part of the Samoan culture. Their livelihoods have been embedded into the Samoan culture long before the arrival of the missionaries. In a broad outlook of the *fa'afafine*, it can be understood that they are very much accepted within the Samoan community. Winston Halapua clarifies this claim by saying "Members of this distinct community are not deprived of their roles in village communal life or of their rights or privileges to contribute their gifts as baptized Christians...very often evoking a kindly and loving understanding within communities" (Halapua 2006, 28). In other words, the *fa'afafine* are widely recognized throughout the community despite their sexual identity. The Samoan culture continues to celebrate *fa'afafine* in many different aspects. Although a sense of inclusion of the *fa'afafine* is expressed within the Samoan communities, there are some things that often go unnoticed.

Although there are not many distinct documentations of hate crimes against LGBTQ+ communities, such crimes are nevertheless present in Samoa. According to interviews held with individuals that identify as LGBTQ+, statements were made on how they were often beaten by both family and friends, all in effort of beating the 'gay' out of these individuals. Ashleigh Feu'u, a *fa'afafine*, claims her mother tried to persuade her to refrain from living her life as a *fa'afafine*. Deciding not to follow the advice of her mother, Ashleigh faced an upbringing full of bullying and teasing, constantly ridiculed for her sexuality (Feu'u 2018).

In a similar albeit more drastic case, we look into the recent film documentary called *Leitis in Waiting* (Wilson 2018). Looking into the lifestyle of the *leiti* within Tonga, the film demonstrates a somewhat broken relationship between the *leitis* and the Tongan community. This gap is seen to grow as less rights are granted towards the *leitis*. According to one of the main subjects in the documentary, Eva Baron, she was beaten by

families and friends for most of her life, in an effort to make her straight and into a more 'natural' state (Wilson 2018). This 'natural' state was however far from who she was, as Eva clearly stated how she was a woman, stuck in a man's body (Wilson 2018). To protect *leitis* like Eva, Papiloa Bloomfield Foliaki started the first Tonga's Leiti's Association (Wilson 2018). Many *leitis* were being beaten, ridiculed and slandered for their ways of living, and so the Leiti's Association was created as a safe haven for those in similar situations. Beaten because of one's association with the LGBTQ+ community was an all too common story and it raises certain issues concerning equality and what that means. With the supposed rise of homosexuality, divisions continued to persist whilst the LGBTQ+ communities continued to fight for their rights to be heard.

Looking at the American and Pacific contexts, we can identify how both have similarities in hate crimes; the former however posing more drastic than the latter. In line with dealing with these hate crimes and facing these different oppressive states, both contexts are still seen to produce a space for the LGBTQ+ communities. Within the US, a law was created to protect the LGBTQ+ from hate crimes. In most cases, such laws would be considered a win for the said communities, however these communities continued to suffer and those who were against still acted out on hatred. Within the Pacific, although the hate crimes are few and not as serious of a threat as seen in the US, these crimes should still not go unnoticed.

One thing that must be mentioned though is the space recognized for these third-genders. When third-genders are recognized as part of the fabric of the community, it offers a lesson to the US on how a space could and should be given and protected. A space granted and most importantly respected offers a sense of how one can provide a union between opposing parties.

### **1.1.2. Inequality**

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the talk of homosexuality went through a rollercoaster of events that affected the LGBTQ+ communities. After being diagnosed as a sickness, many different forms of psychological procedures were done to provide healing for the homosexuals. For example, conversion therapy of inflicting pain on an individual when experiencing homosexual thoughts was a famous practice used to rid one from their homosexual desires. Due to a lack of evidence of showing one's change, results from psychological procedures were inconclusive. The medical field was thereby unsure whether homosexuality was truly a sickness and whether healing was even necessary (Balswick and Balswick 1999, 70). The churches were often seen to rebuke and criticize the LGBTQ+ communities because of their own personal beliefs (Hoffman 2011, 125). Although many members of the LGBTQ+ community identified themselves more freely after the Stonewall incident, the divisions that had existed still ensured that this growing community would be continuously slandered for their lifestyle choices. As the ultimate sense of being treated equally was and perhaps is the general hope of the LGBTQ+ communities, seeking it was often far-fetched because of how divided society had become.

Looking into the US military, over 3000 military personnel were discharged for engaging in homosexual activities (Brash 1995, 55). LGBTQ+ were not allowed in the US military, however many fought to have the right to join and sign up. In an effort to grant such equality to the LGBTQ+ communities, President Clinton introduced the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' (DADT) bill. This bill stated that no military personnel was allowed to seek information or haze another for information about one's sexuality. The DADT bill was created to allow the LGBTQ+ communities to serve in the armed forces. Although this bill granted the right of the LGBTQ+ communities to join the armed forces; the

downside was that it also put those who came out, back into the closet<sup>4</sup>. Long clarifies it as such, “By not being asked about their sexual orientation, and importantly not to volunteer such information, soldiers and prospective military personnel are being required to treat their homosexuality as a dirty little secret” (Long 2004, 118). Although there was a sense of equality being granted to the people, there was never any equality given due to the constant suspicion of one being gay or lesbian, which in general had created more divisions within the military.

Looking into a more recent issue, same-sex marriage rights were heavily sought by the LGBTQ+ communities. In 2015, the Obergefell v Hodges case went to court to seek same-sex marriage rights for the LGBTQ+. As a result, the Supreme Court granted same-sex marriage rights throughout all 50 states, as well as within US territories. Although this was a momentous event for the LGBTQ+, the ruling still caused divisions. It became evident that for many, issues were raised that same-sex marriages would threaten the welfare of the people (Reinbold 2017, 81). Such threats are seen through the constant debates and the inequality expressed by those who oppose the issue.

These threats and effects of same-sex marriage laws are felt throughout the US as well as within its territories, specifically, American Samoa. In regards to the law, it was mentioned by the American Samoa government that they have decided not to abide by these laws that were passed by the Supreme Court due to cultural reasons and beliefs (Sagapolutele 2015). In respect to culture within the Pacific, it can be understood how important culture is to an individual as it defines who you are. The legalization of same-sex marriage puts all eyes on the LGBTQ+ communities of the Pacific: the *fa’afafine*,

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<sup>4</sup> This is a term often referring to those who are hiding their sexual orientation from the world. In a time where gay and lesbian movements were still very uncommon, many who displayed their true nature were often heavily ridiculed. The term of being in the closet refers directly to those who sought to keep their identity hidden from society – all in a matter of being safe.

*fakafefine*, *mahu* and so forth. As many of the third-genders within the Pacific are often viewed as part of their indigenous frameworks – for example the *fa'afafine* being rooted deeply into the Samoan culture – a problem arises when they are denied their rights. Expounding on the issue of American Samoa, the government expressing their stance on the issue leaves the *fa'afafine* left hidden in the closet about their feelings towards same-sex marriage. In such situation, expressing one's opinion brought on a sense of fear of going against the Samoan culture. It can be noted how culture has shaped us to believe a certain way in regards to the same-sex marriage laws passed, however it raises a concern of whether these views can ever change.

Attempting to look beyond the topic of same-sex marriage which affects primarily American Samoa, we look at the inequality perceived through one's right to simply be themselves within the Pacific. Attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ communities in the Pacific are very complex. Due to the influence of culture as well as the conservative Christian views, there are mixed feelings towards the LGBTQ+ communities. As mentioned before though, despite these third genders being overly active within their communities, there is a fine line drawn about how they are truly accepted within society. Comments on the Pacific in regards to the LGBTQ+ are made by claiming, "Being gay is technically illegal in many South Pacific countries, including the Cook Islands, Niue, the Solomon Islands, Tokelau and Tonga. Lesbianism only gets an official mention in Samoa, where it is also illegal" (Gerber 2014). In regards to being noted as illegal, the penalties of being caught in the act of homosexuality would result in 7-20 years of imprisonment (Gerber 2014). As it can be understood of how these third genders are interconnected with their own Pacific cultures, it is amusing to note how although they are 'accepted', but such acceptance poses limitations.

As we look into these dual contexts, we observe how both contexts have their limitations. Despite being given some rights within the US, there is still much that the LGBTQ+ communities are seen to fight for as inequality continues to linger for the said community. Although the DADT bill was passed, and even with the law being passed for same-sex marriage, the LGBTQ+ communities are still seen to be ridiculed and discriminated against for who they are. Scott Hoffman records how “Homophobic attacks still continue at an alarming rate in this nation. According to a recently published FBI report, some 1,706 people were the target of anti-sexual orientation hate crimes during 2008, an increase of 11 percent from the year before” (Hoffman 2011, 147). Over 20 years later since the death of Shepard, hate crimes are very much prevalent within the US society.

Although it was mentioned earlier how hate crimes are not of the same level in the Pacific as they are in the US, these crimes are very much existent and should thereby not be disregarded. Having a space for these third-genders within the Pacific, limitations are seen through the laws being passed to criminalize homosexuality. It can also be seen through the way US Supreme Court laws are observed within American Samoa. Making ties specifically to Samoa, it can be seen how the *fa'afafine* are recognized as part of the fabrics of the communities, however, they are not truly accepted in full terms. Left in a state of confusion of how far such acceptance of the LGBTQ+ should go, seeking equality and redefining how we look at homosexuality should be reviewed.

### **1.1.3. The Lack of Relationality**

As it has become evident that there are many problems that have risen throughout the development of homosexuality, there is a clear picture which depicts the lack of relationality made between these divisions. With two parties, those either for or against, problems have constantly taken place, widening the gap between the two parties.

Throughout the US, although LGBTQ+ rights have come a long way, the LGBTQ+ communities still experience many forms of inequality and are constantly seeking liberation. Their jobs are never safe as it is still legal to fire an employee because of one's sexual identity. Kids in school who recognize themselves as transgendered still seek gender neutral restrooms in hopes of not being mocked for choosing either other bathroom. In terms of sports and medical practices within the government and throughout many different fields, oppressive actions and discrimination are constantly being made towards the LGBTQ+ communities.

As we look into the concept of family, it is understood how the typical family consists of a father, a mother, and children. In situations where this ideal picture is not fulfilled due to a set of gay or lesbian parents, families are perceived to be incomplete or unnatural. Within such situations, claims are made of the incompetency of the parent due to a supposed lack of motherly or fatherly presence, affecting the growth of the child. However, multiple studies have been conducted on the effects of homosexual parenting (meaning dual mothers or dual fathers) on their children claiming that same-sex parents have no negative effects on children.

It can also be seen through how the media portrays the 'coming out' moment of a child to their parents. There are cases where parents were seen to accept their children for who they were. However, there are just as many cases of parents disbanding and disowning their child. In any case, within the understanding of one's family, the relationship between parent and child is often broken, ultimately leaving one in a state of oppression. The knowledge of what it means to be embraced and loved by the parent is lost, affecting heavily the wellbeing the LGBTQ+ child.

Analysing now the relationality within the Pacific, we are presented with similar problems as expressed throughout the West yet different in dynamics and the way it is



responded to. Observing the nature of the *fa'afafine*, despite being recognized throughout the community as great leaders and advocates within the church, it raises a question whether these third-genders are truly accepted within their respective cultures. Halapua makes note of this relationship through a reference made of the *moana* (ocean) and the need for interconnectedness by saying:

“Their strong sense of identity and belonging are gifts from God, which wait to be fully celebrated by the church. In this way we are releasing reciprocity for the benefit of the whole humanity and the world. When we seek to do justice to leiti, *fa'afafine* and others with different sexual orientations we shall also do justice to all people because our wellbeing is always interconnected with that of others” (2006, 37-38).

As the *moana* stresses the idea of interconnectivity, when we exclude the LGBTQ+, we also exclude those of the third-gender who associate themselves with the LGBTQ+ because it claims that we are no longer connected with them. We are encouraged then by Halapua to listen, to talk and to learn from one another. Hope dwells amongst the stories of these third-genders, or the *fakafafine* and *fa'afafine* of the Pacific, the gifts of Oceania for such ongoing debate in this issue of sexuality (Halapua 2006, 26).

As we have witnessed American Samoa's stance on same-sex marriage, it also hints at their views towards the issue of homosexuality. In a way, the relationality between American Samoa and the *fa'afafine* or LGBTQ+ communities were broken. The things that we do towards the LGBTQ+ communities of the Pacific affect us all as we are all part of the Pacific. Their lifestyle and livelihood is embedded in the fabric of our culture and as such, we have a duty to heal the broken relationships they have come to have, help to liberate them from oppression and most importantly, amplify their voices so that they can finally be heard. To do so, we turn to identifying the possible roots of problems which will shape this thesis.

#### 1.1.4. Why the Discrimination?

Throughout the Pacific, it is common knowledge that we are people influenced by two distinct things, our culture and the church. Looking within our Pacific island nations, we see how some cultures influence our religion, or vice-versa where our religion shapes our culture. In some erratic situations, we see how both culture and church are seen to work alongside one another. Whatever the situation may be and the relation held between the two pillars, it can be noted clearly of the Pacific's involvement within both the church and their culture.

Influenced greatly by two factors, we look first into culture. As it has been alluded to earlier of how the *fa'afafine* and perhaps even the *fakafefine* have long been part and embedded into the very fabrics of the Samoan and Tongan culture, it begs the ultimate question of why there are no references made of the *fa'afafine* within the missionary logs. It was noted by Niko Besnier that despite the very detailed reports that were made during the missions in Samoa, there is no direct notification of there being *fa'afafine* during such time (Besnier 1996, 293). The question begs why? According to historical documents to neighbouring island missions in Tahiti, there were many *mahu's* which presented themselves to the seamen. The same was also said for the people of Aotearoa (Besnier 1996, 294). If such was the case, it raises the question whether the missionaries were seen to 'hide information'<sup>5</sup> of the *fa'afafine* by not including them within reports and in doing so, they sought to change the behaviour of the *fa'afafine*. Whatever the case, we are able to devise two things. One, this issue was not deemed important during this time and

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<sup>5</sup> With an emphasis placed on 'hiding information', a disclaimer must be made here to state that such information will not be retrieved throughout discussion of the thesis. As both Besnier (1996) and Herdt (1996) have generated a wide study on gender, we note here that gender is not the focus placed on such research. As the focus is primarily placed on Biblical and theological interpretations, we thereby note the simple glance at gender from a cultural perspective – not by means of stating it's unimportance to the topic as a whole, but rather due to limitations in research. To clearly note then, this research will not explore the gender studies around the LGBTQ+ but will rather venture the Biblical and theological studies in a means of providing a renewed theology from a trans-oceanic perspective.

expanding the rights of the *fa'afafine* was not necessary. Or two, it can be seen and understood that since the culture was not the reason for the disapproval of the LGBTQ+ within Samoa, perhaps it was through the way religious views were observed within the church.

Looking at the latter thought, one can make a fair assumption that missionaries in Samoa sought to hide the *fa'afafine* from history, however it raises the concern of why. Understanding the mission today, it can be said that homosexuality or effeminate behaviours displayed in the early missions of Samoa was not accepted. Similarly, such actions of homosexuality were not accepted as is evident through the differing Pacific island nations which are still seen to criminalize homosexuality. Making ties to the way homosexuality is being addressed by the churches of the Pacific, or specifically in Samoa, it is evident that addressing the issue is non-existent due to a ranging amount of factors which will be discussed later. However it can be noted that despite the acknowledgement by the churches, many are still vocal in their opposition towards homosexuality. Such can be seen through the views posed by Israel Folau.

Alexander Rheeney from the Samoan Observer, offered comments on Folau saying that hell awaits the drunks, homosexuals, adulterers, liars, fornicators, thieves, atheists and idolaters, and in line, added that repentance is needed in order to be saved (Rheeney 2019). Israel Folau, is seen to make comments on social media that offended many, including the Rugby Australia Association. Viewed to have had gone against the code of conduct laid out by the Rugby Associations, Folau was requested to remove his comment made through social media while also providing an apology. Refusing to apologize for his comment, his beliefs as a devout Christian took him away from his job and terminated his contract.

Folau's comments was believed to have been rightly justified as his comments are directly quoted from the Bible, I Corinthians 6:9-11. However as such Biblical text was written nearly 2000 years ago, many have already developed differing thoughts towards the text. The Bible is no longer reviewed in black and white and in likeliness, many forms and styles of interpretation have already and are now being made.

Looking more in depth at Folau's comments, it can be seen how although his comments reflected his own faith, the comment was seen to generally affect everyone. Following the concept of relationality as emphasized by Rev. Dr. Upolu Luma Vaai (2015), there is a severe loss of relationality made in Folau's comment. Whether the *fa'afafine* or any other counterpart categorize themselves under the umbrella of the LGBTQ+ communities, these people are nevertheless affected. As they are affected, effects also have a toll on the Samoan community and the Pacific as a whole. In the end, although such words came from a means of one's faith, such words, thoughts and actions play an effect on all. Regarding the comments made by Folau, we understand the heavy influence that the Western thinking has placed on the Pacific and we are thereby in need to seek avenues of new reinterpretations.

This thesis will thereby examine the broad cultural and societal views on homosexuality in the Pacific and how that compares to specific sources from the Bible<sup>6</sup>. Along with looking at cultural and Biblical norms, we will also be looking at a few key doctrines<sup>7</sup> and/or norms based around theological understandings. In identifying how traditional interpretations were once made in the US, we seek to detect how they have

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<sup>6</sup> Such biblical texts are thereby listed: Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18-25; 19; Leviticus 18:22; 20:23; Deuteronomy 23:17; Judges 19; I Kings 14:24; 15:12; 22:46; II Kings 23:7; Romans 1:18-32; I Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:33; Jude 7.

<sup>7</sup> There are three distinct doctrines or theological concepts that will be studied within this thesis: Doctrine of Sin, Sexual Immorality and the Image of God.

affected the Pacific. In all, it is important as we attempt to provide a new relational meaning within the Pacific.

## **1.2. A Trans-Oceanic Worldview: Situating the Researcher**

As a Samoan born male raised in Hawaii, the diasporic ways of doing things had become a way of life. The norms of life and the commonalities of doing things, although they differed from the native methods of performing different tasks in Samoa, these norms provided a way of being, for myself, as well as for many who grew up in the diaspora, providing our own distinct images. Although I am shaped by the Pacific way of living brought on in Hawaii, the obvious American nature could not be disregarded here, as I am very much shaped by the American culture and practices. Veering away from my American culture while focusing primarily on my Pacific identity will fail to display my true worldview. In so speaking, this thesis will explore my worldview in Hawaii as an American, while also using my identity as a Samoan, to investigate the issue of homosexuality which is present within the Pacific.

Growing up in Hawaii, the *fa'afafine*, which can be translated as 'in the manner of a woman', was something that I was no stranger to seeing. They were a steady presence at Samoan festivals, church services, and in simple terms, no stranger to society. Within the church, the *fa'afafine* stood out due to their charismatic presence and powerful voices. Clarified more in depth, Halapua mentions that, "In the villages and at national level, members of *leiti* and *fa'afafine* communities are at the forefront of activities and their individual skills and gifts contribute to community life at all levels" (Halapua 2006, 29). In general, the *fa'afafine* are seen to be widely used throughout the community and culture. However, in comparison with the topic of homosexuality, the acceptance of the *fa'afafine* within the community has its limitations.

Although very much prevalent within society, the topic of homosexuality was never discussed to a full understanding in Samoa. Similarly today, sermons within the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa (CCCAS) and lectionaries as well are often seen to stray away from these sensitive topics. The reasons as to why homosexuality is not preached on is complicated and not always clear, however many possible speculations can be made as to why. People may often point to the topic as irrelevant. Remarks are also made of one's fear to preach on such topic and providing their personal beliefs. Some seem to remain in denial, claiming that the issue is not prevalent in our context today. Comments can also be made of one's lack of knowledge on how they are to address the topic. Whatever the case, it has been commonly seen within the CCCAS that such topic is too sensitive to address. It thereby bears the question on how such problem is to be addressed in our society today. Due to the sensitivity of the issue, attempting to traverse a delicate topic may be difficult. However when viewing the issue from a trans-oceanic perspective, we are offered a clearer picture on how we can deal with these issues.

Beginning with the term 'trans-oceanic,' I situate myself within this research as one who belongs to more than one ocean, land and location. This multi-layered aspect of my identity is commonly understood as a product of trans-culturalism, a process in which two or more cultures inform one another through dialogue and immersion leading to a culmination of many cultures. Yolanda Onghena clarifies on the concept by stating, "Transculturation is a process the elements of which are altered and from which a new, composite and complex reality emerges" (Onghena 2008, 181). In a world where diversity often evokes fear, this thesis seeks to eliminate such fear. Finding the beauty in diversity, we look to use this diversity to promote a sense of growth. By way of drawing from American and Pacific (Samoan) contexts, the aim is to engage in a form of *talanoa*