SAMOAN CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS OF *TĀ-VĀ*

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NOTIONS OF TIME AND SPACE, or *tā* and *vā* in traditional Samoan society, are clearly marked and understood and correspond very closely to similar ideas entertained in other Polynesian societies, such as among the Tongans, Maoris, and Hawaiians. This is not just a matter of coincidence, for it is also very much due to the common origins of all these societies in a proto-Polynesian empire that covered the so-called Polynesian Triangle of Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa.

Initially, it is hypothesized that the people we now call the Polynesians formed a subgroup of people who migrated from Melanesia into Fiji approximately 1250 BC according to reconstructions by archaeologists and linguists (Bellwood 1978; Jennings 1979; Green 1979; Kirch 1984; Irwin 1992). These people spoke a common language and shared a common material culture and plants (e.g., such as kava), food (e.g., taro, yams, and bananas), and animals (e.g., pigs and chickens). They brought with them an aristocratic form of society that was characterized by the rule of men (or women) with ability, such as those who proved their prowess in war or who were successful in obtaining mana (divine power) from their gods (spiritual ancestors).

While the form of this aristocratic society will take many forms in subsequent migrations to the East, the existence of chiefs (*ariki*, *aliʻi*) and shamans (*taula aitu*) was already evident in this early empire, which, according to tradition, was controlled mainly from centers in Samoa and Tonga (cf. Pritchard 1866; Murray 1876; Turner 1884; Stair 1897; Brown 1910; Mailo 1972; Le Tagaloa 1991; Kramer 1994).

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The earliest of these leaders were Fitiaumua, preeminent chief of Manuʻa, who is said to have conquered parts of both Tonga and Fiji, and Tui Tonga Ahoeaitu, reputed to be the first Tui Tonga. The latter is also said to have formed the first Tongan empire in Samoa.

Notions of time, or *tā*, and those of space, *vā*, are crucial to an understanding of major aspects of Samoan culture, and they are essential in the lives and worldview of commoner Samoans and those of aristocratic heritage alike. *Tā* enables a continuity of communication with the ancestors in terms of time, and *vā* enables the ordering of social space. That is, if *tā* enables contact with the ancestors in the spiritual world (*Pulotu*), that is, with the past, then *vā* determines social relations in terms of the present. This essay addresses the essential role of notions of *tā* and *vā* in Samoan epistemology and highlights the intertwined nature of traditional religion, material relations, the experience of the passing of time (a day, a month, a year), and the quality of relationships between chiefs and those who serve them.

Tā Defined

The word *tā* in Samoan means "to beat" or "to strike." Thus, it can mean to strike a gong for religious services in the evening or to ring a bell to summon worshippers to the cathedral, and it can also refer to beating rhythm on a mat, especially where songs and chants are involved. In one Samoan war dance, the performers tilt their spears while yelling out to strike one's opponent, to strike him dead. The two significant meanings of the word are therefore to strike out at something and to provide rhythm. Both are physical acts but different applications. In this essay, I am more concerned with *tā* as a rhythmic act.

The simplest example of *tā* relates to dance movements. For example, traditional Samoan chants and songs, especially those that deal with the achievements of the ancestors both past and present, are accompanied by rhythmic beats of a stick or a specially prepared piece of wood on a mat or hollow bamboo. Then, of course, Samoan dances are invariably accompanied by set rhythms, such as the *taualuga*, where the dancers also use their hands and more particularly the feet to maintain rhythm. Thus, in the *taualuga*, the main dancer, that is, the *taupou*, or ceremonial virgin, moves the lower feet back and forth to maintain a rhythmic pattern while the hands "tell the story," for Samoan dancing is preeminently a form of mimetic dancing, one that tells a story. Hence, Samoan dancing is both rhythm and meaning. But rhythm is also a complex phenomenon within a broader cultural context.

This stems from the fact that the life of a Samoan is full of natural rhythms beginning at birth. If a Samoan child's mind were fully developed at birth, he or she would be wondering why there is so much hustle and bustle during

the first hours of life in his or her new family. Unknown to him or her, his or her birth is a significant event for that family, for it marks the arrival of a new heir, with all the rights and privileges attached thereto. The birth is not only the result of a biological act on the part of his mother but also preeminently a cause célèbre that involves the families and dynasties of both his mother and his father. In fact, the hustle and bustle are meant to make the postnatal transition comfortable for the mother and for the representatives of the two families to meet, comfort each other, and exchange the required traditional gifts. Socialization of the child will be shared by both families because he or she will be the flag carrier for the family in the future: he as a renowned warrior and she as a virgin bride who will be given away to a high chief, thereby securing her family's future material welfare and high status. That is why when cutting the umbilical cord of children, those of males are cut with a war club to make them brave, and those of females are cut with the instruments for making tapa to make them productive. Yes, even before their offspring are born, Samoan parents entertain ambitious dreams for them.

While gift exchanges involving children begin before birth, these continue between the families of the two parents after birth to celebrate the various phases in the child's development, such as when the child begins to crawl, to stand up, and to walk (Turner 1884). The families also combine to celebrate the other phases of the child's life, such as the rite of passage. If a boy, this means that the young man must undergo the *tatau* operation, which is a costly one, as it requires payment of food, fine mats, and cash to the *tufuga* (artist). If a girl, this means that she must make a substantial gift of the same to the *aualuma*, the village organization for unmarried women (Mailo 1972; Grattan 1985; Kramer 1994). Then one must also reckon major events, such as marriages (*faaipoipoga*) and title bestowals (*saofai*), which also require substantial financial expenditures, most of which are borne by family members (Sunia 1997). Finally, when one dies, the funerary rites (*falelauasiga*) are perhaps the most expensive of all. How, then, does rhythm apply to all this? (Sunia 1997, 118). It is precisely because here we are talking about the rhythms of life, the major landmarks that individuals cross when living their lives: these are predictable, they fall into a pattern, and they are rhythmic. In short, the life cycle constitutes a rhythm.

Rhythmic Cycle of Religion

Edward Tylor, the father of English anthropology, described Samoan religion as animistic, which translates into a belief in spirits (Tylor 1899). While that may be true in a general sense, it does not properly describe the emotional and spiritual attachments that Samoans gave to their gods. These gods were certainly spirits who inhabited material phenomena, such as stars, moon, sun, rocks,

animals, fishes, birds, and insects (Turner 1884; Stair 1897; Murray 1876). The inhabited phenomena were called *ata*, pictures or visible representations that the gods had elected to appear in, and while much respected, the real object of the Samoans' religious worship lay, resided, and centered in the spirit beings that occupied the *ata*. Their prayers were thus addressed to these spirits and not to the *ata* per se. The question, then, is, if there is a rhythm to this religious cycle, how does it occur compared to the life cycle just mentioned?

The rhythmic cycle of Samoan traditional religion begins at birth. The rituals of birth involve the husband or father of the mother reciting a litany of the family's gods during the birthing process. The name that he utters at the precise moment the newborn enters into the human world becomes the personal god of that child for life. Immediately, there is a connection established between the newborn baby and that god. Of course, since Samoans had gods galore, the child will also subsequently give his or her allegiance to other gods, such as the family god, the village god, the district war god, and national gods, such as Tagaloalagi. But this is assumed, of course. What is not assumed is the rhythm associated with the worship of these gods, for Samoans fervently believe that any success in their lives is due to the assistance of their gods. Thus, it was imperative to develop good relations with their gods. How to do this?

Worship of the gods consisted of personal and family prayers, usually in the evenings; group prayers at the village and district levels in preparing for war; offerings to the gods in the form of *matini* or to the shamans, the priests of the gods; and festivals of the gods, such as those to *Le Fe'e* (Octopus) or to *Tupua-le-Gase*, or Tupua, who never dies (Turner 1884; Stair 1897). The ancient prayers of the Samoans closely resemble today's family prayers with the exception that in the old prayers, it was permissible to curse one's enemies and to wish them harm. Today, of course, Samoans are taught by their Christian mentors to forgive and bless their enemies. In their religious worship, therefore, the beliefs and practices of pre-Christian Samoans resembled those of modern Christianity in terms of individual and communal prayers, offerings, and religious festivals.

But that is not all, for Samoans also believed in immortality. At the time of death, the spirits (*agaga*) of the chiefs went to *Pulotu*, the Moanan equivalent of the Christian Heaven. Those of the untitled people went to *Sa-le-Fe'e* (Place of Bondage), the equivalent of the Christian Hell. This appears to be a continuation of the hierarchical world of the living. In *Pulotu*, the chiefs serve as "posts," a metaphor for service, of the god of *Pulotu*, *Saveasi'uleo*. Presumably, they can have everything they want there, but they can also help their living relatives if summoned from *Pulotu*. Thus, a famous chief named Taii was distressed because his enemies forced him to climb a coconut tree

upside down. He called on help from *Pulotu*, and none other than *Saveasi'uleo* sent his daughter, *Nafanua*, to help *Taii*. The result was a war fought and won by *Nafanua*. That was about 800 years ago. When the London Missionary Society agents arrived in 1830 to bring Christianity to Samoa, *Nafanua* was the leading god of the country. Christians say she foretold her own demise as a goddess, but I doubt it. Her end came about largely because Samoans desired Western education, goods, and medicine, which they could possess only by converting to Christianity (*liu lotu*) (cf. Williams 1984).

Wherein, then, is the rhythm in traditional Samoan religion? I maintain that this rhythm lies primarily in the personal cycle of one's religious life. Samoans are born and raised in a religious environment, however different in terms of denomination. Today, this cycle means for Christians baptism, holy communion, formal membership in a congregation, regular attendance at religious services, and funerary services at time of death. In addition, one also has social and financial commitments to one's church. When all these are put together, one can identify a certain regularity in religious behavior. This regularity can also be referred to as religious rhythm. It is also a hallmark of Samoan cultural identity.

One can also discuss cycles of economic and political rhythms, but these are more complicated because of the wide disparities in income and political power. These disparities have led to class divisions, so any rhythmic cycles would be more appropriate for particular classes than for general ones. Therefore, I will not deal with these. But one can still talk about rhythms in the natural world.

Samoan Perceptions of Time: Day and Night

The introduction of telecommunications in the form of radio, television, telephones, watches, clocks, the Internet, and so on have drastically affected the way Samoans perceive time, but we can still feel (and observe to a certain degree) the effects of pre-Christian beliefs and practices. Most prominent among these is the measurement of time in which various natural phenomena are used. The hours of the day, for example, were counted according to the position of the sun in the sky, while the hours of the night were identified through the crowing of the cocks (L. F. Va'a, unpublished data). As for the lunar cycle, Samoans used the position of the moon in the sky to reckon its phases, such as waxing and waning moons, new and full moons, and so on (Penisimani 1860). As for the yearly cycle, there were also markers that identified particular months according to the special characteristics of certain types of winds, such as *vaito'elau*, the monsoon or hurricane season, and according to the appearance of certain kinds of sea foods, such as the

vaipalolo season, named after the *palolo*, a kind of edible worm spawned by the coral (Turner 1884). These markers were in turn supported by the evidence of other natural phenomena, such as the blooming of certain bush flowers, easily recognizable by their particular fragrances.

Samoan reckoning of the time during a twenty-four-hour period was based on the observation of the senses, that of sight during the day and of hearing during the night (Aiono 1996). During the day, time was measured in terms of the sun's position in the sky, and at night, it was measured according to the cock's crowing. Thus, time measurement was a practical affair and accessible to all, just as knowledge of the winds and currents was based on the collective wisdom of generations of observers. There was nothing mystical or magical about it, just a matter of a simple but practical science. Using European time as a model, the following is an example of the various phases of time over a twenty-four-hour period. I say "example" because Samoans may differ over some aspects of names of corresponding times, but the essential point is that there is substantial agreement (L. F. Va'a, unpublished data):

12 a.m.	Tulua o le po ma le ao.	Time when ghosts roam the land.
2 a.m.	Vivini muamua o moa.	First crowing of the cocks.
3 a.m.	Vivini faalua o moa.	Second crowing of cocks.
4 a.m.	Vivini faalausoso'o moa.	Repetitious crowing of cocks.
5 a.m.	Gasu o le taeao.	Early morning dew.
6 a.m.	Teaeo sesegi.	Dawn approaches.
7 a.m.	Oso le la.	Sun rises.
8 a.m.	Totogo le la.	Sun gets hotter.
9 a.m.	Fana'e lupe le la.	Time to feed the pigeons.
10 a.m.	Taupaletu le la.	Sun prominent in sky.
11 a.m.	Faaitula.	Time before noon.
12 p.m.	Soliata/Tutonu le la.	Standing on own shadow; noon.
1 p.m.	Faliu le la.	Sun moves to the side.
2 p.m.	Pale le la.	Sun is crowned.
3 p.m.	Malu afiafi.	Temperature cools, evening nears.
4 p.m.	Taulaumea.	Leaves fall.
5 p.m.	Pupula a la goto.	Sun prepares to set.
6 p.m.	Goto le la.	Sun sets.
7 p.m.	Tagi alisi.	Crickets chirp in the evening.
8 p.m.	Ula afi o faamalama.	Fires lighted for evening prayers.
9 p.m.	Fofola fala.	Mats laid out for sleeping.
10 p.m.	Tofa.	Sleep.
11 p.m.	Vivini faaoso malaga.	False alarm by cocks crowing.

(cf. Aiono 1996, 90; Simanu 2002, 598)

Since Samoans did not have watches or clocks as they do now, these were the expressions that they used to refer to periods of the day, not so much specifically to time but rather to time in a general sense. Thus, as a period of the day, *fana'e lupe le la*, or the time for feeding the pet pigeons, which most families had, could be either 8 or 9 a.m. And *ula afi o faamalama* may occur at 7 p.m. instead of 8 p.m. as in the above model. This method of labeling time was sufficient for Samoans' needs in the precontact period and for a long time even after contact with the West. But today, most Samoans use *palagi* time as measured in hours, minutes, and seconds. Some traditional expressions are still popular, however (L. F. Va'a, unpublished data). These include the following:

Oso le la	sunrise
Tutonu le la	midday
Goto le la	sunset
Tagi Alisi	chirping of crickets
Faiga lotu	evening prayers

Samoan Perceptions of Time: Lunar Months

As the London Missionary Society missionary George Turner explained, the moon was the timekeeper of the year (Turner 1884, 203), not merely in terms of weeks, as Samoans understood these, but also in terms of the year.

The Samoan lunar month consisted of thirty days, divided into two parts, the moon as it appears on the inland side (*uta*) and as it appears on the seaward side (*tai*). When it first appears on the inland side, it hovers over the horizon. When the seas are low, it can be seen clearly; when high, it is hard to see. That is why it is called *malupeaua* (Penisimani 1860) because the moon at that phase is, as it were, protected by the seas.

When it first appears as the new moon, Samoans started counting the days from one to ten. When that is achieved, only five days remain for the moon on the inland side, and those days were called *punifaga*, *tafaleu*, *fe'itetele*, *atoa*, and *le'ale'a*. That is one-half of the moon period.

The moon now moves over to the seaward side of the island, and again the days are counted from one to ten. When that is reached, only five days remain, and these are called *sauaeleata*, *lotoatai*, *alu ae ua tafatetele ata*, *petumai*, and *o ma le la poo le fanoloa*. Then the moon disappears for a time, until it rises again from the other side as the *maluopeaua*.

According to Rev. George Turner (1884, 203 ff.), the year was divided into twelve months, and each month was known by a name in common use all over the group. To this there were some local exceptions and a month named

after the god, who on that month was specially worshipped. Generally, these months were called as follows:

1. *Utu Va Mua* (January). So called because it represents the first digging of wild yams before the cultivated ones were ripe. It was also called Aitu Tele, "great god," from the principal worship of the month, or Tagaloa Tele, at another place for the same reason (Turner 1884, 204).
2. *Toe Utu Va* (February). Continuation of digging wild yams or Aitu Iti, small gods, from the worship of inferior household gods in that month (Turner 1884, 205).
3. *Fa'aafu* (March). Word meaning "withering of the yam vine," a sign the yams have matured and are ready to be consumed (Simanu 2002, 599). Other names for this month are *Ta'afanua*, a god noted for his wandering habits, and Aitu Iti, the small gods who were specially implored to bless the family for the year "with strength to overcome in quarrels and in battle" (Turner 1884, 205).
4. *Lo* (April). So called because the little fish *lo* (or *pinelo*) is particularly plentiful at this time of year. The month is also named after the Manu'an hero Le Fanoga.
5. *Aununu* (May). It means "crushed or pulverized state of the stem of the yam" at that time. Also named after a goddess, Sina. According to Turner (1884, 206), Samoans regarded this month as unstable with many vicious demons about and the fish particularly savage. It is the time of transition from the wet to the dry season, and hence crushing sickness and superstitious vagaries were prevalent.
6. *Oloamanu* (June). Sound made by a pigeon and other birds when they are happy because of a plentiful supply of their favorite buds and berries. This occurs about this time. Literally, "warbling (*olo*) of the birds (*manu*)."
7. *Palolo Mua* (July). This is the first month of the half year, called the Palolo season, in contrast to the other half, called the Tradewind season (Turner 1884, 206).
8. *Palolo Muli* (August). The *palolo* is an edible sea worm that is released from the coral twice a year, usually October and November. It is a delicacy with most Samoans. *Palolo Muli* perhaps suggests final preparations in anticipation of receiving the *palolo*. These include the making of special nets.
9. *Mulifa* (September). Means "end of the taro stem." This month is "unusually dry and parching, the scorching rays of the sun left little of the talo stem but a small piece at the end" (Turner 1884, 207). That is, the sun's rays have literally sucked the moisture from taro plants.

10. *Lotuaga* (October). According to Turner (1884, 207), this month is so called because Samoans often prayed for rain. A time of drought. In Aiono (1996), the word should be *Lotoaga*, but she does not explain its meaning.
11. *Taumafamua* (November). First of plenty because fish and other food were plentiful, followed by *palolo* and fly-hook feats (Turner 1884, 208).
12. *Toetaumafa* (December). End of the feasting, food being less plentiful because of gales and cyclones (Turner 1884, 208).

And then the annual cycle begins again.

Two things stand out in the Samoan system of naming their months. The first is that the names record the main activities of each month. For example, the first three months—January, February, and March—involve the search for wild yams and other foods from the forests because it is a time of heavy rains and hurricanes, which have the tendency to destroy traditional food crops, such as taro, bananas, and breadfruit. Hence, it is also coexistent with famines, especially if plantations have been wiped out by strong winds. April is the month for catching the fish *lo*; June is the month for catching birds, such as pigeons, because they are then at their fattest; July and August are the months to prepare for the *palolo* season; October is the drought period and a time for conserving the water supply and taking extra care for the prevention of bushfires; and November and December are times of plenty, when the growth of food crops are at their peak (L. F. Vaʻa, unpublished data).

The second factor that stands out is the close association that Samoans maintained between their earthly activities and their relationships with their gods, thus the naming of many months after their gods. In January, the *Aitu Tele* and *Tagaloa Tele* are honored; in February, the *Aitu Iti*; in March, *Ta'afanua*; in April *Le Fanoga*; in May, Sina the goddess; and so on. It shows quite clearly that the ancient Samoans held a high regard for their gods and that they relied on their gods to sustain them in the difficult periods of the year. Human efforts were not enough; the intervention of the gods in human affairs was also assiduously sought. There is thus this spiritual aspect of Samoans' perception of their environment, and this is continued today under the form of the new Christian religion in its ideology and idiom. For just as the pre-Christian Samoans prayed to their *aitu* (gods) for rain, so they do today to their new Christian god—and with the same results (L. F. Vaʻa, unpublished data).

In all these examples—the measurement of time according to the hours of the day and night, the lunar cycle, and the yearly cycle of twelve months—one sees the operation of this natural rhythm, the *tā*. The foundations of these cycles are scientific and hence reliable and can be counted on by humans to plan their activities. There is a rhythm in the manifestations of the day,

month, and year, perhaps not in a sense of that derived from a simple dancing mode but most certainly in the sense of an overriding cosmic beat, one that the pre-Christian Samoans took to heart and lived by. Today, of course, this rhythm has been partially lost through the influences generated by modern technology and its attendant problems generated by changes in lifestyles. And to that extent, the power, or mana, of the ancient rhythm has been weakened. But it continues to throb under the surface of social and cultural life, especially in the context of the rural areas where the *fa'a-Samoa* holds sway.

The *Vā* Defined

If *tā* is the defining beat of Samoan traditional society, then *vā* defines Samoan cultural knowledge, for it is *vā* that tells us how to live and relate to others according to the norms and values established by society (Mailo 1972; Sunia 1997, 2000; Simanu 2002). Orators have different expressions to refer to the same phenomenon, but basically it says that Samoa is a land that has been apportioned with regard to its rights and privileges (*o Samoa o le atunuu ua uma ona tofi*) and that none can be added or removed (*e le mafai ona toe faaooopo i ai pe toesea ona paia ma mamalu*). This is confirmation that rights and privileges within society are ascribed rather than prescribed or inherited rather than achieved. This is, of course, axiomatic in terms of such a conservative traditional society as Samoa, but it does not rule out exceptions, particularly in the case of war heroes and outstanding individuals. People however do not talk about these as a rule, but more on the doxa or set beliefs (Bourdieu 1977).

The *vā*, or human relationships, are symbolized by spatial relationships. Another way of expressing this is that physical space represents social space. A simple example is that of height: in Samoa, this symbolizes position in a power hierarchy—the higher the position occupied by a person or house, the higher the power of that particular person and those people who live in a particular house. That is why in Samoa, the highest chiefs, such as the Tui Manu'a (king of Manu'a), were manually carried on specially constructed carriages, higher than everybody else. And when such a carriage passed a group of people, they were required to kneel and bow their heads. They cannot walk again on the ground traversed by the carriage because such has been affected by the mana of the chief and therefore rendered *tapu*, or sacred. This means the *tapu* has to be removed, usually by the act of sprinkling coconut juice on the affected ground, before it can be used again. As to houses or *maota*, no villager can build a house higher than that of his or her chief, and normally this is the case in most villages in Samoa. Moreover, this is one of the chiefly rights that is still upheld by the Land and Titles Court.

Extensive social networks permeate Samoan society, each with its own rules and practices. These networks do not occur at random, for they are often predictable and have at their base kinship relations. These in turn are already determined, or given, according to cultural standards. Since the typical Samoan has many relations, not only with his or her own relatives but also with other people unrelated to him or her, such as other village or district chiefs, he or she is involved in a web of relationships, the conduct of which pertain to certain rules. The persona in Samoa then is often of the type described by Maurice Leenhardt (1979) as one who occupies the center of a series of social relationships but one moreover who is also experiencing the pangs of social change, as new lifestyles affect those relationships. The persona, therefore, is potentially in a state of flux. Still certain patterns of behavior are predictable, and I shall here provide only a few examples of the *va* involved in these networks, such as relations between siblings, between brother and sister, and between chiefs and their *tautua* (serving men or women).

The brother/sister relationship in Samoa, called *feagaiga*, is one of the most important relationships in Samoan culture (*faʻa-Samoa*) because it determines questions of rights and privileges pertaining to land, titles, and other treasured possessions (*mea sina*) of a family (Gilson 1970; Schoeffel 1979; Shore 1982). It is similar to the custom of *vasu* in Fiji and *fahu* in Tonga. The *vā* determines the kind of work brothers and sisters do: the brothers perform the difficult chores, and those considered "dirty" and far from home. The sisters do the easy ones, those regarded as "clean" and in or near the home. The brothers are supposed to support, in a material sense, and protect, in a physical sense, their sisters in return for their moral and spiritual support (cf. Vaʻa 2001). Within the family and indeed Samoan society, the sister enjoys a higher status than her brother (compare a similar custom in Tonga), and that is why she is often given the honor of serving the chief as *taupou* (ceremonial maiden). As such, she leads the family on ceremonial occasions, such as a *taʻalolo* (presentation of food to visiting dignitaries), where the *taupou* is dressed up in the traditional manner and dances using a *nifo oti* (ceremonial war club). She also plays important functions in *ʻava* ceremonies and funerary rituals. As *ilamutu*, or eldest of the female children, she occupies a central role in the spiritual life of the family as chief adviser to her brother chief, oracle and priestess of the family gods. The position, therefore, is equated with supernatural powers. Thus, the family is characterized by a dual structure: one where the brothers are responsible for safeguarding the lands and titles of a family and one where the sisters safeguard the moral and spiritual side of a family. Both functions are regarded as complementary.

In Samoan custom, the brothers are obliged to respect the roles of their sisters and vice versa. Fortunate are the brothers who listen to the advice of their sisters, for this is based on the moral and spiritual values of society, and to go against such advice is regarded as dangerous. This is because in ancient times, sisters had the power to curse their wayward brothers, usually in the form that they would be childless. Brothers, on the other hand, can be vindictive against their sisters if they besmirched the family honor, such as getting involved in secret sexual encounters. This model, therefore, does not support the claim of sexual permissiveness among Samoan adolescent girls (cf. Mead 1961; Freeman 1983), but it has served as the foundation for other institutions in Samoan society, such as the relationship between a high chief and his orator and between a church pastor and his congregation, the orator and the pastor occupying the place of the sister and the high chief and congregation that of the brother. The high chief and congregation must show respect and provide material support for their *feagaiga*. These in turn must provide their moral and spiritual support for their counterparts (high chief and congregation), which is meant to spell success in their social endeavors.

Social relationships between siblings also follow certain well-defined pathways characterized by, besides the *feagaiga* system already referred to, other kinds of rights, such as those of the firstborn and seniority. The firstborn male in any Samoan family is given the prestigious title of *ali'i o 'āiga* (literally, "chief of the family"). This is because as *ali'i o 'āiga*, he has the right to succeed his father to the *matai* (chiefly) title of the family, and so, long before his father dies, he is groomed for this purpose. Other family members show him deference due to his position. The counterpart of the *ali'i o 'āiga* among the female children is the *ilamutu*. As the eldest daughter, she has first place to the family honors reserved for the female gender, but as *ilamutu*, she is often regarded with awe due to the supposedly spiritual powers she possesses, for she is healer (*taulasea*), oracle (*vavalo*), peacemaker (*pae ma le auli*), and miracle maker (*fai vavega*) among her many assigned functions. The prominent roles that these oldest siblings enjoyed through the accident of their birth order entitled them to the respect, obedience, and service of their younger siblings.

Seniority, based on age, is a hallmark not only of Samoan society but also of *Moana* society in general. Wherever Samoans are gathered, other things being equal, age alone determines who will be leader of a group. It applies also to siblings, both males and females. If the oldest male or female dies, then the next oldest takes over the role of *ali'i o 'āiga* or *ilamutu*. It is quite obvious that the principles of succession to leadership roles within a family group are already entrenched in the beliefs already mentioned. There is a predictability about the social order that bodes well for the establishment of a stable society.

According to Mailo (1972), the earliest form of Samoan society was based on a seniority system; that is, only the elderly were members of the Sa Tagaloa Ruling Council, today's equivalent of the Village Fono. There were no chiefs then, only the elderly Tagaloas, who differed from each only through the different suffixes to their names, hence Tagaloa-ui, Tagaloa-leniu, and Tagaloa-lefau. Seniors were similarly treated with reverence and respect.

Tautua as *Vā*

We come now to the concept of *tautua*, the principle affecting the relationships between a chief and his retainers. As other anthropologists have noted, Polynesian chiefdoms can be divided into the rigid hierarchies of Eastern Polynesia, represented by Hawai'i, and the more open societies of Western Polynesia, represented by Samoa (cf. Sahlins 1958). In Eastern Polynesia, blood is everything in determining rights to title and land; in Western Polynesia, even commoners and unrelated persons can succeed to a chiefly title provided that they gave service or excelled in some act of bravery in either war- or peacetime, which resulting in the saving of the life of a high chief. Thus, in Samoa, it is said, "*O le ala i le pule o le tautua*" ("The path to authority lies in service"). Having blood is not enough; providing service is. It is regarded as a sine qua non of being elected to a title (cf. Davidson 1967; Meleisea 1987).

Much has been written about the nature of *tautua* (cf. Simanu 2002; Sunia 1997, 2000; Mailo 1972). Briefly, these authors have identified two main kinds of rendering service to a chief. One may be considered as falling within the class of positive examples of *tautua*, the other within the class of negative types. Some examples of positive *tautua* include *tautua tuavae* and *tautua matavela*. For negative *tautua*, examples are *tautua pa'o* and *tautua fia matai*.

Tautua tuavae is where the *tautua* is known to use his or her feet and hands to do chores for the chief (from *tua*, meaning "behind," and *vae*, meaning "feet"). *Tautua tuavae* therefore are supposed to occupy a place behind their chiefs so that they can carry out instantly their wishes. *Matavela* means "burnt eyes," from *mata*, "eyes," and *vela*, "burnt" or "cooked." It refers to the *tautua* whose eyes are "burnt" by the heat given off by the hot stone oven that he uses daily to prepare the chief's food. Closely related to this form of *tautua* is *matapalapala*, from *mata*, "eyes," and *palapala*, "soaked with sweat" and therefore dirty. The sweat in turn is due to other hard work this person accomplishes for his *matai*.

Tautua pa'o means making a lot of noise while serving a chief because the *tautua* is angry with his chief for some reason or other. He then displays

his displeasure by causing unnecessary noise and doing unpleasant things that cause the chief discomfort. Closely related to this form of *tautua* is *tautua gutua*, one who constantly contradicts the orders of his chief, thereby committing the cardinal sin of chief/*tautua* relationships, one of disrespect toward the chief. Another instance of negative service is *tautua fia matai*. It refers to a person who performs services for his chief not out of love for his chief and family but out of a selfish desire to succeed to a *matai* title, hence, *tautua fia matai*, or serving with the desire to become a chief. Incidentally, becoming a chief is/was a legitimate ambition of every Samoan male. But other factors are also at play here; a *tautua* should also be qualified to hold the title due to his or her deep knowledge of Samoan custom and tradition, various genealogies, and village honorifics as well as the means to fulfill the social obligations required of the title. Pedigree, of course, is all important.

The *vā* in Samoa is not only physical space or social space alone but also the two combined. Hierarchy, for example, is symbolized by height, as mentioned earlier: equality by lateral distance and commonality (being of the lower classes) by lower distance. Thus, typically in Samoa, the chiefs live on the tops of the mountains; hence, the creator god's family, Sa Tagaloa, was said to live on the mountains, and the created beings, such as the family of Lu, lived at sea level. From the lower level, Lu's supporters attacked those of Sa Tagaloa on the upper levels and almost conquered them but for the intercession of the god himself (see Kramer 1994).

Having established the significance of physical and social space (i.e., they stand for each other), the question naturally arises, What is the function of space in human relationships? Space, as I see it, is a second-order language, a means of talking about the social order, the values, practices, and beliefs of a people (e.g., the Samoans about themselves and their own society). Like culture, it is a human-made creation and, therefore, like culture, is subject to contestation. Such difference is itself the product of new perspectives on life gained through education and through the spread of global culture. Any changes in the traditional perspectives of the *tā* and *vā*, however, will be gradual and take much longer to consolidate. They will not happen all at once. Therefore, the past will continue to linger in importance in our social and cultural configurations. The *tā* and *vā*, as Moana concepts relative to time and space, turns neutral concepts into cultural ones and transforms chaos to order (Māhina 2004, 2009).

Conclusion

In Samoan society, the notion of *tā* refers to time as understood not by Europeans but rather by Samoans in a historical context. This means that

the ancestors are not really dead, even though the traditional ceremonials mark the end of life of the ancestors. They have merely passed on to another level of existence, to the land of Pulotu, where the sun sets in the west, or to Heaven, which is above us, to use a Christian metaphor. The traditional idea of death, therefore, approximates that of transition because the dead live on in a spiritual sense, in a spiritual world, whence they emerge to assist the living in whatever enterprise they are engaged in. Therefore, the death of an ancestor signifying the past transposes into that of the living ancestor, signifying the present. This enables constant communication with the ancestors. Prayers, in the form of *tapuaiga*, and social rituals, such as *ava* rituals, were the usual means of relating to the ancestors and other nature spirits.

The notion of *vā* is more prominent because spatial patterns of behavior signify our current social positions in life. Hence, the spatial metaphors of *uta* (inland), *tai* (seaward), *luga* (above), *lalo* (below), *sisifo* (west), *sasae* (east), *tala ane* (besides), and so on are significant markers of Samoan social identity (*faasinomaga*). For example, higher positions symbolize power, and lower positions mean the reverse. In real life, Samoan social etiquette reflect these realities of geographical space.

Modern Samoan society still follows the customs that *tā* and *vā* have imposed on the society, especially in the villages. But the inroads of Western civilization introduced by the liberal ideas of equality for all, chiefs and nonchiefs, men and women, and third genders, have complicated the nature of social relationships. This is now characterized by the emergence of a class structure that has no respect for the niceties of traditional social etiquette. We are now possibly heading into an era where consensus is no longer the order of the day but one where contestation of ideas is. The full effect of these changes, however, remains a long time and distance away, and the past in the form of traditional knowledge and know-how will continue to affect us.

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