

7. Oceania's crucible effect, Moana Cosmopolitans and the reinvention of vā

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If the term 'Moana Cosmopolitanism' is a recent invention, the people and networks it describes are not. Doubtless, there were even earlier Moana Cosmopolitans than the ones we remember here if we follow Lana Lopesi's (2021, p. 84) description of Moana (Oceania/Pacific) Cosmopolitans as 'not bound by restrictive notions of home' but, rather, mediating differences between their local and global worlds and building 'a social world of Vā Moana based on relational concepts of vā'. The early Moana Cosmopolitans we focus on in this chapter, and whose individual and collective lives we explore for Moana Cosmopolitan ways of rethinking life, are those who met in the 1970s–90s in Moana hubs—particularly Suva and Honolulu—and reconceptualised Indigenous concepts like vā. Many arrived in these hubs as former or current sikolasipi (Samoan: scholarship) recipients, having been uprooted and separated from their communities at an early age to attend secondary school in one of the imperial centres. At hubs like the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, a crucible effect (Teaiwa, 2010) took place as Moana academics from different islands overcame isolation and began to collaborate as academics: they shared resources and built networks that eventually solidified into new and more appropriate institutional structures. They created an environment with rich opportunities to nurture innovative approaches to producing knowledge that were oriented by values and principles shared across the Moana. These early Moana Cosmopolitans then moved out into the world and/or back home and continued to reinvent vā for the generations of a new millennium.

Vā Moana as 'relational geography' was perhaps first imagined by Epeli Hau'ofa, a creative academic and activist of Tongan ancestry, born in Papua New Guinea (PNG), educated in Tonga, Fiji, Australia and Canada, later becoming an educator in PNG, Tonga and Fiji. Hawaiian scholar Ty P. Kāwika Tengan (2018, p. 151) ascribes to Hau'ofa an ability to straddle 'multiple and sometimes ambivalent—if always regional—identities'. In his imaginative writings, he opposed (mostly Australian) scholars' 1990s post-Cold War classifications of Oceania as isolated and marginal, dotted by tiny 'islands in a distant sea' and aid-dependent and failed states (Mangioni, 2021). Hau'ofa, instead, presented Oceania as a vast, connected and connecting territory of exchanges, 'a place of expansive possibility' (Tengan, 2018, p. 152), thus re-changing the 'meaning of geography' (Morris, 2010) back to a preceding vision of relationships across the Moana.

Anthropologist James Clifford (2013, p. 198), in a chapter about far-reaching relationships across the Moana, calls Hau'ofa 'an indigenous-cosmopolitan visionary' in terms of 'structure and transformation, determinism and emergence, pessimism and hope'. Hau'ofa's provocative essay 'Our Sea of Islands', published in 1993, 'influenced a generation of Oceanian scholars and artists as well as others—such as myself—attempting to think their way out of the sterile dichotomy of "local" and "global"' (Clifford, 2013, p. 195). These scholars, artists, writers and poets were, for example, from Tonga, Sāmoa, Banabas, Cook Islands, Rotuma, Niue and PNG (see Lopesi, 2021). When they met at regional university hubs in Suva, Honolulu, Auckland, Wellington, Canberra or Sydney, they recognised common concerns in their diverse backgrounds and practices—an 'expansive regionalism, a kind of indigenous world-making' (Clifford, 2013, p. 195). These 'inspirational scholars, writers, activists, and students' provided new approaches to important issues like 'the nature

and diversity of ‘indigeneity’ today, scale making in various ‘globalizing’ sociocultural processes, the inventive dynamism of ‘tradition’ and the question of what might be called differential historicities’ (Clifford, 2013, p. 196). Notably, much of what Clifford (2013, p. 196) finds ‘most useful for thinking through our current utopic/dystopic moment has come from the Pacific’, partly because the proponents refused to commit to a narrow disciplinarity. This manifests in Hau‘ofa’s own energetic efforts to set up the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture. Opened in 1997 at the USP campus in Suva, Indigenous artists collectively connected Oceanic lines of creativity, in a ‘perpetually improvised, creative, and unpretentiously radical style’ and in congruence with Albert Wendt’s call for a ‘new Oceania’ (Wendt, 1982, p. 201). Wendt, writer and academic, demanded respect and support for the diverse contributions of varied Moana ‘subcultures’ to create a new culture ‘free of the taint of colonialism and based firmly on our own pasts. The quest should be for a new Oceania’ (Wendt, 1982, p. 206). Like Edouard Glissant, Wendt and Hau‘ofa worked to reconcile academic discourses with the creativity of Moana art forms, ‘the desire for rootedness in place with cosmopolitan openness’ (Last, n.d.).

The term ‘cosmopolitan’ has been used in many different ways, and with different intentions. Expressions like ‘citizen of the world’ or ‘cosmopolitan outlook’ referred in ancient Greek philosophy to those to whom humankind mattered more than their own native land—people who were sophisticated in their own culture yet open to others and without prejudices (Rizvi, 2005). However, when it is assumed that one’s limited provincial experiences and values are universally valid and shared, the concept is arrogant (Pinsky, 1994). Scott Malcomson (1998, p. 242) argues that ‘the rest of the world has almost nothing to learn from the West’ concerning cosmopolitanism; instead, given its greater interest in non-imperial and non-‘rational’ cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitan ethical practice will be extended by the non-Western world. In the 1970s and 1980s, the early Moana Cosmopolitans we want to honour here demonstrated in many ways that Kantian cosmopolitanism is but one among many local versions. Indeed, their ideas contributed to a ‘decolonial cosmopolitanism’ that can transform global modern coloniality into a pluri-versal world (Mignolo, 2011, p. 22).

In this chapter, some early Moana Cosmopolitans will help us trace the genealogy of Albert Wendt’s paragraph about *vā* in ‘Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body’ (discussed below) to understand why it became so iconic. Our reflections cluster primarily around the exchange about a ‘new Oceania’ between Albert Wendt and Epeli Hau‘ofa. Unfortunately, as Keith Camacho (one of our reviewers)¹ pointed out, this focus introduces a bias in that, inadvertently, the life and work of two men, artists and academics from Sāmoa and Tonga, is disproportionally foregrounded. We had aspired to more inclusion by considering their shared time at USP, the constellation Teresia Teaiwa has called a ‘crucible’. Much thinking towards a new Oceania simmered in this cauldron, and a large number of Moana Cosmopolitans (many of them women and men from Melanesia) congregated around it.² Due to our focus on Wendt and Hau‘ofa’s connections, we only tell part of this story. Also missing are artists, thinkers and creative practitioners who stayed ‘at home’ and did not travel. A fuller account emerges from the work of, for instance, Vince Diaz and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (2001), Diaz

¹ We are very grateful to Keith Camacho and Lana Lopesi for critiquing our text, and we hope that our responses to their questions and challenges match their generosity. If this chapter does not engage with many of the main protagonists’ detours and contradictions, this is not to hold them up as people without flaws, but to focus on progressing the strengths of their work, relationships and insights.

² As is well known, Hau‘ofa felt more Papuan than Tongan, and Albert Wendt was acutely aware of a pervasive disproportionality in the representation of Moana people. At the 1977 meeting of the UNESCO Advisory Committee for the Study of Oceanic Cultures in Port Moresby, for example, Wendt (1977, p. 2) noted that Polynesia was ‘heavily represented, whereas Micronesia has only one representative. Melanesia, which contains over three-quarters of Oceania’s total population, is inadequately represented’, and that there were no Indigenous delegates from the New Hebrides, Aotearoa or Australia.

(2019), Lea Lani Kauvaka (2016), Lana Lopesi (2021) and Quito Swan (2022),³ but there is some research that still waits to be done. Although there are certainly other markers of cosmopolitanism, we focus here on the protagonists' engagements with relationality in and beyond each Pacific homeland.

The first section, 'Uprooting', canvasses the experiences of sikolasipi students, as they were called in Sāmoa—that is, students who were selected at primary school for scholarships to study at secondary schools and universities of their colonial centres. We are interested in the impact of their formative experiences and environments on their later identifications and actions as decolonial theorists and activists. The next section, 'Routing', looks at Wendt and Hau'ofa's collaborations at USP, where some of their students developed their early praxis. The search for a regional identity, as part of the decolonial project, mapped onto a widespread tendency in Oceania to look for commonalities across differences—thus building commitment to the region and creating and nurturing relations with anti-colonial movements globally. 'Home making, residencies and returns', finally, follows these tendencies in the diasporic development of the notion of *vā* from the late 1980s in Aotearoa, as it emerged from Wendt's publications and activities.

Uprooting: The Sikolasipi (scholarship) generation

In the 1950s, many of 'the first wave—that first full generation of conscious, conscientious Oceanians' (Teaiwa & Marsh, 2010, p. 233) left their island homes to obtain higher education in Fiji, Australia, Aotearoa, Tongatapu the US and the UK. Many of them would eventually meet at the USP campus in Suva.⁴ Wendt, who has written extensively about his experiences as a sikolasipi recipient, recalls winning the scholarship and travelling by boat with other Samoan boys and girls to attend boarding school in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1952 aged 13. The children went to different schools across the country, but the boys met during the holidays at a Boys Brigade camp on the Reikorangi River, in huts and a hall rented for the duration by the New Zealand Government. They had a 'tremendous time' together, playing tennis, going upriver and eeling at night. So closely knit was their community that, eventually, they preferred sharing time at camp to spending time with family, and the friendships built then would last for decades (Wendt et al., 2022).

Sikolasipi boys also shared the experience of being considered special. Wendt recalls the announcement of his scholarship award on 2AP Radio in Sāmoa. Particularly his own family's expectations were an obligation: 'you have to do well unless you break ... it was terrible'.⁵ Yet, at that time, winning a scholarship was the only opportunity for children like him to attend a secondary school and later university (Wendt, 2015). Their departure to Aotearoa New Zealand thus uprooted, at a very young age, a select few who journeyed on the *Matua* for a week, stopped for two days in Suva, Fiji, to arrive in a cold, foreign country—far

³ Swan's book makes further cosmopolitan connections beyond the Pacific, as between Indigenous academics at UPNG and the Pan-African liberation movement.

⁴ Apart from Wendt and Hau'ofa, these included, for instance, Tupuola Efi (Tui Atua), former Samoan head of state; Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa, current Samoan prime minister; Mālama Meleiseā, Samoan historian, UNESCO director and judge; Aiono Fana'afi, Samoan historian, educationalist and linguist; Banaban John Teaiwa, agriculturalist and civil servant, and his daughter Teresia Teaiwa, academic, poet, activist from Kiribati/Honolulu/Fiji; Rarotongan anthropologist, writer and first president of the South Pacific Creative Arts Society (SPCAS), Marjorie Tua'inekore Crocombe; Tongan academic and poet, Konai Helu; Tongan anthropologist, historian and academic, Hūfanga 'Okusitino Mahina; and Tongan linguist and academic, Melenaite Taumoeofolau. Futa Helu had earlier attended high school in Sydney and then the University of Sydney as a student of John Anderson, the realist philosopher; he and returned to Tonga to launch the 'Atenesi Institute (later University) in 1963.

⁵ See also: Thaman (1985, p. 110).

away from their families whom they would now see only every three years. They sometimes felt profound loneliness, in a place that was even more separate from home and the 'āiga than a Samoan school formed by colonial history (Wendt, 2015). Having withdrawn into a 'cocoon of self-consciousness', Wendt became familiar with 'almost overwhelming dread' (Wendt, 2015). Without telephones, communication took place through letters: 'My dad would write to me. Beautiful letters. And my brothers and sisters would keep me informed. He would send me the newspapers—*Samoan Times*, *The Bulletin*' (Wendt et al., 2022). At camp, Wendt met not only fellow Samoans but also students from the Cook Islands, Niue, Sāmoa and Tonga. These encounters might already have initiated a later predisposition among Moana Cosmopolitans to recognise commonalities in the very particularities of other Moana cultures. Later, at college, Wendt formed close relationships with Māori artists, educators and activists like Fred Graham, Arnold Wilson and Selwyn Muru, who all took anti-racist and anti-colonial positions. In this supportive environment, Muru stood out as a painter, poet, linguist and musician. These multi-talented artists combined interests and projects, rather than separate them into different disciplines and engagements—the latter 'a very Western thing' that may lead to professional fame but not to wellbeing (Wendt et al., 2022). In the Moana Cosmopolitan context, art, academic involvement and politics (for Wendt, particularly an interest in the Black and anti-colonial movements in the US, Africa and the Asia Pacific region) went hand in hand. However, government policies eventually left them no choice but to enrol in subjects like teaching or science degrees, which were considered useful for their countries.

Hau'ofa, too, was one of 'very few Islanders' who went 'overseas for schooling' in the 1960s (Hau'ofa & Thomas, 2012, p. 122). For his MA at McGill University in Montreal, he carried out fieldwork in Trinidad, where the exposure to Vidiadhar Surajprasad Naipaul's works not only lastingly influenced his literary work but also forged a 'conceptual connection between both island regions' (DeLoughrey, 2009, p. 25). Hau'ofa returned to the Pacific to obtain a PhD in anthropology, based on ethnographic work in PNG, at The Australian National University (Thomas, 2012; White, 2008). In his early writings, he expressed conflicting emotional and intellectual allegiances—on one side, to the peoples of Oceania, who were redefining their identities to overcome colonialism, and on the other, to the discipline of anthropology. Alienating experiences led him, by 1975, to call 'pseudo-evolutionary' comparisons dividing the region into 'developed' Polynesian and 'underdeveloped' Melanesian polities 'clever, thoughtless and insulting'; in their lack of understanding and empathy, they effectively bolstered 'the long-standing Polynesian racism against Melanesians' (Hau'ofa, 1975, p. 287). His scholarly successes in colonial institutions came with the troubling insight that 'rigorous training in the uncompromising empiricist tradition in outside settings' robbed non-Western anthropologists of the intuitive knowledge of their countries. It was clear, then, that better ways had to be devised to widen the discipline's horizon 'in order to tap instead of suppressing the "feel" and the subjectivity to which I have referred' (Hau'ofa, 1975, p. 289). Though he served as head of the USP Department of Sociology for a while, his overall trajectory involved artistic and performative ways of knowing, particularly as founding director (1997–2009) of the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture (OCAC).

Hau'ofa, who spoke Tok Pisin fluently, considered himself a Papuan until he was nine and only came to see himself as a Tongan to some extent during his high school years in Tonga—though at first he 'felt a complete foreigner and [was] treated as such' (Hau'ofa & Thomas, 2012, p. 122). Then, at school in Fiji, he 're-identified', so that his Australian university friends later thought he was Fijian (Hau'ofa & Thomas, 2012, p. 122). Educated as a Pacific person, he felt after completing his master's degree that he ought to 'go back home' and serve his community—except, he 'wasn't so sure where home was' (Hau'ofa & Thomas, 2012, p.

123). His relationship with Tonga was complicated, because he did not feel like a ‘full Tongan’; he had not been able to put down roots there, and his relationship with Tongan culture remained ambivalent:

The important thing about my time in Tonga is that I got myself to take the identity as a Tongan. However, Tongans still called me a Papuan. I never got into the heart of the culture. I spent most of my time in a boarding school, so I missed the normal community life of the country. (Hau‘ofa & Thomas, 2012, p. 122)

But he was uprooted too early from PNG to be able to remain a Papuan.

Identity became an issue for many sikolasipi recipients. Having lost their firm attachment to the nu‘u (village) when still young, Wendt and his friends in Aotearoa, for example, shared with boys from other Pacific Islands the relationships that they would have shared with brothers and cousins in Sāmoa. Community now took place independently of the Samoan ekalesia (church), ‘āiga (family) and fanua (land). Politics included less nu‘u and nation, and more globally shared concerns: battles against racism and colonialism were shared—in a non-Pacific language—with groups in and beyond the wider Moana. English would have impacted their thought processes and, for Wendt and Hau‘ofa, excelling in English became a professional asset and commitment, the former eventually becoming professor of English literature at the University of Auckland.

Home was no longer simply (and only) where one was born. ‘If Papua New Guinea was [Epeli’s] birthplace, and Tonga where he originated, then Suva was his home’ (Madraiwiwi, 2010, p. 104): Hau‘ofa valued and lived inclusiveness, despite his role as an ‘outsider’, in Suva as much as in PNG and Tonga. The straddling of ‘multiple and sometimes ambivalent—if always regional—identities’ (Tengan, 2018, p. 151) enabled him to develop a unique ‘pan-Pacific vision’ (Keown, 2017, p. 494). A new type of subjectivity arose, characteristically shaped by traumatic experiences: ‘I was born out of a terrible separation at the end of 1952 from my mother and family, country and culture’ (Wendt, 2015). The ‘sociocultural alienation experienced by diasporic Pacific Islanders’ (Keown, 2017, p. 484) was further aggravated by experiencing racial discrimination overseas and, on the return home, feeling like an outsider. For Wendt, these seismic shifts of identity were both pernicious and liberating (Keown, 2017, p. 484). Interestingly, most sikolasipi recipients married partners from outside their home islands.

All this was certainly disturbing but, as Hau‘ofa noted, the lack of a clear identity was also a chance: it helped him and others to develop a greater sense of a shared regional identity, of being from Oceania (Hau‘ofa & Thomas, 2012, p. 126), or the Moana. The scholarships, by bringing together groups of people who might otherwise have never met, were an important ground for early Moana Cosmopolitanism. The difficult period of adaptation to a different country, culture and climate, the separation from ‘āiga and friends, the pressure to excel academically—for many, this might have initially induced an inward turn, an acutely felt individual identity, which they shared and expressed in writing.⁶ The changes in the scholarship recipients’ lives, in turn, would have changed their immediate family, their ‘āiga, the nu‘u, the district and the nation. As Wendt (2015) observes about his own ‘āiga, ‘these scholarships and study abroad turned the Wendt family into the large, complex, multilingual, multi-ethnic international aiga it is today’. The sikolasipi generation globally reshaped Vā Moana, the relationships in and between the islands and beyond.

⁶ Konai Helu Thaman recounts that she had always been shy as a child, writing things she felt strongly about down on paper.

Routing: USP Suva and the crucible effect

Teresia Teaiwa gives an interesting account of what she calls the ‘crucible effect’ that began to manifest among an intellectual elite in the 1970–90s at the universities of the South Pacific and Hawai‘i. Having identified regionalism as ‘Oceania’s version of cosmopolitanism’, she highlights the elite privileges associated with cosmopolitanism. She recalls Hau‘ofa’s awareness of bureaucratic elites; shared common educational and professional experiences, she suggests, gave them coherence and solidarity:

they all went to USP, Auckland University, Canterbury, Victoria University, Australian National University or University of New South Wales, University of Papua New Guinea, University of Guam or University of Hawai‘i. Or maybe they went to the same high schools: perhaps they went to Lelean Memorial School in Fiji as Epeli did, or maybe they went to St. John’s, Cawaci in Fiji and St. Bede’s in Christchurch as Tonga’s current Prime Minister did, whatever. Most Tuvaluans in politics and public service today went to high school in Kiribati. And many of our key indigenous Pacific scholars have worked at either USP or UH. (Teaiwa, quoted in Brunt et al., 2010, p. 93)

Shared experiences at these hubs resulted in ‘a sort of crucible effect that helped produce the particular region that Epeli and Albert came to know’ (Teaiwa, quoted in Brunt et al., 2010, p. 93). The crucible effect among those at USP—including ‘the Crocombes, Malama Meleisea ... the Thamans, the Griffens, and all the neo-Marxists (Vijay Naidu, Simone Durutalo and William Sutherland to name only a few of the locals)’ involved building on each other’s ideas, and keeping ‘each other sharp precisely because they weren’t always in consensus’; it created ‘opportunities for intense, sustained, rigorous, challenging engagements’ (Teaiwa, quoted in Brunt et al., 2010, p. 93). USP differed from other locations through the intense engagements between Polynesians, Micronesians and Melanesians. Thus, a collective of established and emerging writers from across Oceania published together in *Kovave* (UPNG) and *Mana* (USP), transcending ‘barriers of culture, race, petty nationalism and politics’ and revolting ‘against the hypocritical/exploitative aspects of [Oceania’s] traditional/ commercial/and religious hierarchies, colonialism and neocolonialism and degrading values’ (Wendt, 1975, p. 11). Under Wendt’s mentorship, poetry became a powerful political statement of unity (Swan, 2022, p. 136).

In the next generation, at the University of Hawai‘i, this crucible effect would involve Teresia Teaiwa, Ty Tengan, Vince Diaz, April Henderson, Vilsoni Hereniko, Brett Graham and Keith Camacho; later, at University of California Santa Cruz, Diaz, Teaiwa and Henderson. Teaiwa, in particular, worked closely with Hau‘ofa.⁷ When she passed through USP in 1993, she was invited by Hau‘ofa to present at a seminar series; he then carved ‘out what was to be [her] first bona fide academic job’: lecturer in history/politics at USP (Teaiwa, 2010, p. 106). She participated significantly in activities at OCAC and co-organised the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies Conference, ‘Imagining Oceania’, in 1999.

Both Wendt and Hau‘ofa participated in early activities of the South Pacific Creative Arts Society, the Oceania Centre’s predecessor,⁸ contributing in particular to the first issue of the

⁷ From 1989 to 1990 she studied for an MA in history at the University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa, and from 1992 to 1993 worked as graduate research and teaching assistant at the Center for Cultural Studies, University of California Santa Cruz.

⁸ SPCAS was a precedent for OCAC. It had been set up by Marjorie Tuainekore Crocombe, who had participated in writing workshops aiming to find new forms of expression on the background of participants’ experiences of traditional practices in PNG at the Suva campus of USP in 1972, together with other writers and artists (Von Gizycki, 1988, p. 547).

Mana Annual of Creative Writing in 1973. They provided new publishing opportunities for emerging writers from the countries USP served, and Wendt, *Mana* editor from 1974 to 1980 (Keown, 2017, p. 483), was a mentor for many. As if a magnet had been moved over iron shavings, the new annual brought forward a novel image of Oceania and a creative potential that only few had intuited (Von Gizycki, 1988, p. 547). *Mana* became ‘a vehicle to carry the rich cargoes of individual talent from every part of the Pacific to every other part, both within and beyond the island shores’ (Marjorie T. Crocombe, quoted in Von Gizycki, 1988, p. 547). The new Oceania, then, was first imagined collectively in literature and art. OCAC was, in Hau‘ofa’s vision, a place where people from different parts of Oceania could freely explore and express creative ideas, unimpeded by the conventions often imposed by their communities. The centre’s work was inherently interdisciplinary: the poetic intertwined with the scientific as writers, musicians and visual artists also engaged in sociology and/or anthropology. Participants showed that disciplinary confinement, taken for granted in Western institutions, is not a given for:

Indigenous writers and artists, who often work in multiple media and who often juxtapose genres and forms, such as a written poem and a drawing, painting, sculpture, carving, textile, basket, photograph, moving image, or live performance. (Allen, 2012, p. xxii)

Disciplinary organisation misconstrues Oceanic life worlds by separating ‘the spiritual from the political, literature from history, or economics from psychology’ (Wood, 2006, p. 36). Unsurprisingly, Hau‘ofa articulated his vision of ‘Oceania as a place of expansive possibility’ at the very moment ‘he was shedding his identity as an anthropologist’ (2018)—that is, as a discipline-bound outsider. Work at the centre became paradigmatic for ‘ever-shifting, ever-vibrant space[s]’, in which ‘attachments to land and ancestors and ... identities’ (Wood, 2006, p. 388) were formed while, at the same time, traditional cultural practices and forms were innovated, away from pressures to conform. When, in 1994, *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* appeared in Suva, the collective project of innovation became visible: the ‘25th anniversary publication’ of USP included 20 authors and three editors—all commenting on Hau‘ofa’s famous essay (Clifford, 2013, p. 200; Hau‘ofa, 1993).⁹ Soon after, Teaiwa built on his work and refigured ‘Oceania as a dynamic space, a native “cosmopolitanism”’, exploring ‘how customary patterns of dwelling and traveling were being rearticulated in contemporary national and international contexts’ (Clifford, 2017).

Home making, residencies and returns: Reinventing vā in the new millennium

In Aotearoa New Zealand, meanwhile, Wendt responded to prompts from his friend Ken Arvidson to present at the 1995 University of Waikato conference ‘The Post-Colonial Body’, with a paper called ‘Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body’. Wendt (1996a) admitted to having his hands full with administrative tasks, leaving little time to write, but precisely the paper’s disjointed and additive nature may have allowed him to include his seminal definition of vā that has become the basis for the term’s reinvention:

Important to the Samoan view of reality is the concept of Va or Wa in Maori and Japanese. Va is the space between, the betweenness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All, the space that is context, giving meaning to things. The meanings change as the relationships/the

⁹ Shortly before his death, a selection of Hau‘ofa’s (2008) work, *We Are the Ocean*, was published by the University of Hawai‘i Press.

contexts change ... A well-known Samoan expression is 'Ia teu le va'. Cherish/nurse/care for the va, the relationships. This is crucial in communal cultures that value group, unity, more than individualism: who perceive the individual person/creature/thing in terms of group, in terms of va, relationships. (Wendt, 1996, pp. 18–19)

Vā in Wendt's presentation places tā tatau into the sociocultural or even ontological context in which it flourishes and which it, in turn, shapes. However, in relation to his overall paper, it also appears as an independent concern, and the mention of 'wa' as Japanese and Māori equivalents may indicate that Wendt had been thinking about the concept in its own right.¹⁰ That would perhaps be hardly surprising: in 1988, Wendt had returned to Aotearoa—where he had attended school, university and teachers' college. In the interim years, he served as headmaster of Sāmoa Collage (1965–74) and then taught at USP (1974–88). Life in Apia or Suva would have been quite different from that in Auckland, which, when he came to take the chair in English literature at the University of Auckland (the first Polynesian person to fulfill such a post), was strongly oriented towards its former colonial centre and the US. Its public institutions were still predominantly white and Anglo-Saxon in outlook. Yet Māori, whose migration into the cities had increased after World War II, and many of whom had fought for their rights under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, challenging colonial supremacy, had become visible in the 1970s and 1980s. Pacific people, whose parents had immigrated in greater numbers in the early 1970s, also contested race-based discrimination. Auckland was beginning to change.

In this situation, Pacific people remembered and reconfigured core traditional values to strengthen their communities. Vā, in Sāmoa something rarely talked about, became topical: what was a *space between* in this new situation, with its different relationships, neighbourhoods and institutions surrounded by very different values? How were Samoans to relate to each other in their new places, at church or school, in their families and neighbourhoods? Wendt, having experienced work with the OCAC collective, observed local intercultural politics in Suva and taken a longstanding interest in pan-Pacific and global politics, brought to this new situation his commitment to postcolonial critique—not, for him, an unquestioned acceptance of either global Western or local Samoan values and customs. 'Ia teu le vā, care for the vā', would have to mean something different in Auckland than in Apia, and the vā in the Auckland diaspora would have to rest on different principles.

It is interesting that the paragraph concerning vā became perhaps the most quoted part of his 1995 conference paper—it must have hit a nerve with Pacific communities in Aotearoa and elsewhere. Lily Laita, of Māori, Samoan and Pākehā descent and New Zealand-born, recalls hearing about vā from Momoe van Reiche in 1996, during the South Pacific Arts Festival in Sāmoa (Graham et al., 2021). She was so inspired that she used it in the title of her 2002 painting, *Vā i tā*, representing:

a narrative exploration of the ways in which the temporal and spatial nuances of the vā (space between) have shaped Pacific identity from its island origins to the Pacific Islander diaspora in Aotearoa/New Zealand. (Webb-Binder, 2009, p. 25)

Melani Anae (1998, p. xii) includes vā in the glossary of her PhD thesis, *Fofoa-i-vao- 'ese: The Identity Journeys of NZ-Born Samoans*, 'referring to the distance/position of two people/places/things in relation to each other/their relationship, separate yet closely connected'.¹¹ She returns to it in 'The New Vikings of the Sunrise: New Zealand-Borns in

¹⁰ In the preliminaries of a 2020 interview, Wendt mentioned that he had previously discussed the concept with Māori artist, Selwyn Muru.

¹¹ She glosses vā fealoaloa'i as 'the relationships of mutual respect in socio-political and spiritual arrangements' and vā tapuia as 'the sacred relationships in the socio-political and spiritual arrangements' (Anae, 1998, p. xiii).

the Information Age’ (Anae, 2001), ‘Research for Better Pacific Schooling in New Zealand: Teu Le Va—A Samoan Perspective’ (Anae, 2010) and ‘Teu Le Va: Samoan Relational Ethics’ (Anae, 2016), among other publications. Anae is an Auckland-born Samoan, closer in age to Teaiwa than Wendt or Hau‘ofa, with a set of experiences different from the sikolasipi and labour immigrant generations. Over the course of her academic career, diasporic concerns gave way to transnational/cosmopolitan ones, and these cosmopolitan concerns and experiences began to appear, intrinsically folded into the metropolitan *vā*, particularly as the understanding of conditions arising from an earlier uprooting matured. Samoan-born and New Zealand-educated Albert Refiti (2002) also quoted Wendt’s passage on *vā* in full to explain that *vā*, as a spatial concept, connects Pacific architecture with the open expanse of the ocean.

Gradually, *vā* developed in Aotearoa through an imaginative response of closely connected Samoan and Tongan communities to their new homes, where they had no direct connections with ancestral land. Instead, in their attempts to productively come to terms with alienating experiences and to reformulate their understanding of realities in Aotearoa, they imagined the space between their members as neighbourhoods and, across the globe, through performances and material production (Lopesi, 2021, p. 13). This imaginary production supported a meaningful connection to place, as well as collective and individual identities, through the use of metaphor and similar tropes like *kupesi* (pattern) and *lalava* (lashing). These imaginaries are still recognisably linked to the early Moana Cosmopolitans who ‘made themselves in relation to the colonial imaginary—contending with its impositions while also building something otherwise’ (Lopesi, 2021, p. 14). Wendt’s contextualisation of *vā* in ‘Tatauing the Post-Colonial Body’, and the connection he makes between creativity and collective and individual instantiation of a ‘body “becoming”, defining itself, clearing a space for itself among and alongside other bodies’, ‘a body becoming out of the Pacific’ (Wendt, 1996b, p. 26), allowed Moana Cosmopolitans subsequently to move away from the deficiency narratives associated with the term *diaspora* and to develop novel and emancipatory stories about Moana Cosmopolitans who are ‘intimately connected to—rather than dislocated from—the rest of the world’ (Lopesi, 2021, p. 15).

The engagement with *vā* also helped negotiate the relationship with *tangata whenua* in Aotearoa. The story of the Fale Pasifika at the University of Auckland is also about finding procedures to develop genuine Moana structures at the university—alongside and in concert with Māori academics, students and communities. Teu le *vā* with Māori colleagues and advisors—understanding the *vā* between them and Pasifika as stakeholders in a largely indifferent or ignorant university structure¹²—to develop and cultivate relationships that cohere through a shared commitment to Moana values and principles was a persistent theme in Wendt and Anae’s account of the early years of planning the Fale Pasifika (Anae & Engels-Schwarzpaul, 2017; Wendt et al., 2017).

Vā counteracts the often-precarious conditions of diaspora, in which alliances and well-functioning relational networks are crucial. While, in their homelands, Samoan and Tongan interpellations like ‘*ia teu le vā*’ or ‘*tauhi vā*’ (honouring and nurturing relationships and connections) indicate discord or danger because relationships are disturbed or disrupted and need to be healed or given attentive care, or even a state that is inherently culturally dangerous, new relationships needed to be created and nurtured in the new communities, away from the homelands in radically different environments. Material manifestations of relationships that were handed down for generations were adapted to serve as social metaphors, so that the *pou* (posts) in the Fale Pasifika can still help to re-enact the *fono*

¹² Though the vice chancellor at the time provided a positive, alternative role model for the rest of the institution.

(community gathering) structures and processes through which the affairs of the community are discussed and decided.

Already in the 1990s, the new connections forged within and between Moana communities were enhanced by new technological means of surfing the Moana: email, Listserve, chat rooms and, later, the World Wide Web and social media (Howard & Rensel, 2004; Keegan & Sciascia, 2018; Lopesi, 2021). Accordingly, a new form of relating, the digital vā, arose through the avid use of chatrooms, forums, blogs, Bebo, Facebook and Twitter (see Thomsen et al., 2021). When Covid-19 hit the world in early 2020, many Māori and Moana communities were immediately able to fall back on established patterns of meeting virtually to navigate space and time between them. During this time, new connections were forged, and the restrictions imposed on many communities paradoxically generated new collaborations between them during a time of reaching out. Thus, our research project (which had always contained a blended conferencing component) branched off through virtual means, eventually resulting in a co-hosted conference with our friends and colleagues at the University of Hawai‘i Mānoa (Refiti et al., 2022). The conference had a sense of urgency in the collective wish to make the vā work—to activate, extend and hold on to the connections and relations.

How this virtual vā was to work, which core values needed to be translated into online configurations and how they would give our collaboration common rhythm, colour, space, sound, and even touch, taste and smell, was an important task that turned us towards Indigenous concepts of collaboration more generally and led into a period of intense experimentation, conceptually, technologically and socially, often inspired by the work of Shawn Wilson (2008). As in other contexts, we found that principles like *teu le vā* were helpful in facilitating the translation of Moana ethics and practices into the new context (see Lopesi, 2021, p. 122) by:

identifying and understanding the va or ‘spaces’ between different stakeholders ... [and developing], cultivating and maintaining relationships consistent with the principles and understandings that underpin the widely shared Pasifika concept of va ... [to] strengthen opportunities for knowledge transfer across these spaces. (Airini et al., 2010, p. 3)

Vā’s ongoing development and adaptation to many Moana, Māori and cross-cultural contexts shows the usefulness of the concept, as it emphasises the collective and individual importance of socio-spatial relationships when these, and their underpinning principles, can no longer be taken for granted: in cities like Auckland or Wellington, urban marae (Māori community spaces) have been developed by and for Māori whose *tūrangawaewae* or ancestral marae is further away. They articulate new-old kinds of connections between land and people (Tapsell, 2002, pp. 142–143) and generate relative constellations in time and space in which things, people and forces can be properly aligned.

Conclusion

Our interests in this chapter are the constellations that emerged, in the second half of the twentieth century, from the *sikolasipi* schemes. As an unintended consequence of such colonial scholarships, some selected, gifted (and often privileged) children from Pacific Islands met during their education, in schools and universities in Aotearoa New Zealand, Fiji, the US, the UK, Canada and Australia. They all had to learn to work with disparate kinds of knowledge, in more than one language. In such transnational contexts, they experienced commonalities across their differences and built a vā in which re-articulations and transdisciplinary re-workings of (both Western and Pacific) customary patterns became possible in their politics, writing and art-making. Out of these individual and collective,

cognitive and visceral experiences arose ‘Moana Cosmopolitan Imaginaries’ (Lopesi, 2021, p. 75)—a cosmo-political horizon of life. With the sea of islands, Hau‘ofa (along with others central to this crucible effect) launched a counter version to the dominant narratives that placed ‘the relativity and cultural embedding of the constructions of space directly before our eyes’ (Kempf, 1999, p. 111). A discursive field opened, and with it a game of spatial and cultural truths that demanded critical reflection of Western claims to universality for their (particular) concepts of cosmopolitanism. At the same time, a ‘niu’ (new) subjectivity was formed that both connected and separated these Moana intellectuals with and from their homelands. When they returned home, could they still rely on a shared understanding in their families?

This uncertain situation would not have been helped by the fact that most of the sikolasipi men and women married Pālagi (non-Moana, European) partners. In Sāmoa, they almost formed a new ‘class’—Wendt recounts that some families had problems with the non-Samoan partners, but enough families were in that situation to form a functioning ‘ex-pat’ community in Apia (Wendt et al., 2022). Their ‘integration’ was strikingly different from that prompted by the advent of the missionaries in the nineteenth century: for them, a new ‘class’ was created, the fa‘afeagaiga (making of relationships), which was subsequently integrated into the fono. It is not clear what a suitable analogy would be for the sikolasipi generation. If they held titles later, they would have usually been conferred in the diaspora, on the basis of kinship rather than direct relationships with land. As far as we know, few sikolasipi recipients returned to live in their villages—when based in Sāmoa, they would live in Apia. What, then, were the relationships between the village contexts and the new thinking and protocols sikolasipi recipients had developed in the diaspora (in another country or Apia)? Were the latter ever integrated into customary contexts?¹³ The current Samoan prime minister, Fiamē Naomi Mata‘afa—herself a sikolasipi recipient—remarked during a visit to Auckland University of Technology on 13 June 2022 that she is ‘totally fascinated’ by the research and academic and institutional discourses on vā in the Auckland diaspora—they make her ‘stop and think’ (Mata‘afa, 2022). Like many of our interlocutors during the Vā Moana research project, Mata‘afa explained that vā is never talked about in Sāmoa but practised ‘a lot’. The respectful relationships (between people or with the environment) encapsulated in the term ‘vā fealoa‘i’ (respectful, relational space) are, in her opinion, currently being weakened in Sāmoa to some extent, and perhaps the academic questions asked outside of Sāmoa, like those concerning customary conservation practice based on vā, could be very helpful for deliberations within Sāmoa today.

Driving up Auckland’s Queen Street at lunchtime in 1995, the young Albert Wendt and his Kāi Tahu partner Reina Whaitiri observed a young Samoan man in ‘blue sports shorts, blue T-shirt, short-cropped hair, Reeboks, eating a hamburger and parading his tatau’, nay, ‘letting his pe‘a fly on the first real day of summer’ (Wendt, 1996a). This body becoming, then, a utopian vision or virtual Vā Body, has meanwhile cleared some ‘space for itself among and alongside other bodies’, becoming an actuality in the proliferation of tataued bodies.

¹³ These questions may warrant further research. The exception is Meleisea Malama Meleisea, although he lives in Tiapapata on the hills above Apia, he has a home in Poutasi. The same can be said of Aiono Fana‘afi, whose home is in Alafua, a suburb of Apia, and whose traditional seat is in Fasito‘outa.

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