# 1

# Vā atoa and the ever-moving-present in the Samoan cosmogony Solo o le Vā

Albert L. Refiti

> They are in the Va, the space between, which holds everything together in the Va-Atoa, the Unity-that-is-All.
>
> —Albert Wendt (2015)

The Samoan cosmogony is consistent in the direction of how matter unfolds in the universe. As this chapter aims to show, life unfolds between two states: mavae, the divaricating process of creation, and tōfiga, folding together and keeping things in order. A spatial exposition and diagrammatic outline of the cosmogony reveals the cosmic emplacement of the human, the emanation and spatial qualities of mana, and the genealogy of matter connected to Papa.

By spatial exposition, I mean a diagrammatic visual image of how relations are thought about in Sāmoa. It is also an attitude towards research, a method of *exhibiting*, both in the sense of *opening something up, from the outside* or *something opening up, from the inside*, in a display facing the faces of the people. Figure 1.1 diagrammatically renders the cosmogony of Manuʻa and addresses the question: 'How is space constituted and made manifest in the cultural and philosophical context of Samoan society?' From there, it becomes possible to ask how primordial concepts of space become foundational principles in the web of relations at the heart of Samoan personhood—especially how place-making and the founding of settlements

shape fuaʻiala (inland settlements) and nuʻu (villages). Spatial exposition is also helpful in tracing how these principles are reconstituted as cultural phenomena in the diaspora, and to understand concepts like vā atoa (unity-that-is-all) or tā-vā (time-space).

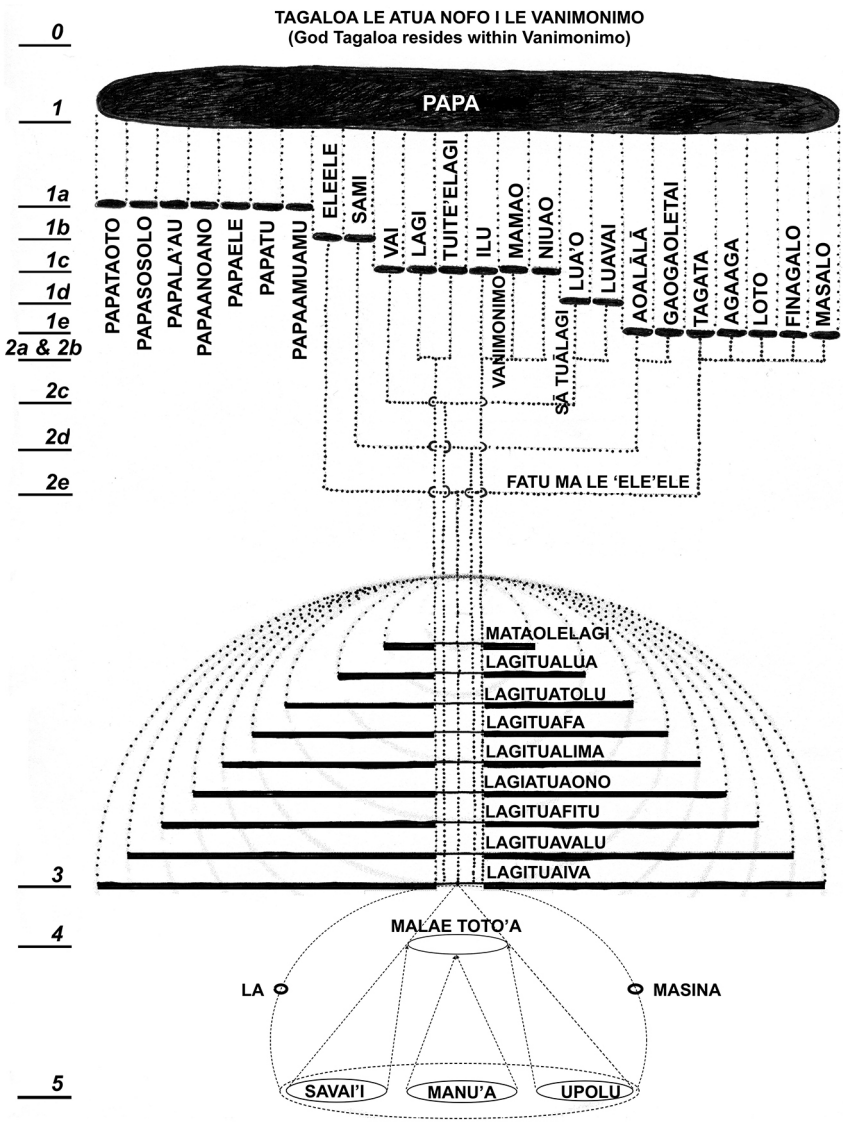


**Figure 1.1: Cosmogram of the Samoan cosmogony.**
Source: Diagram by Albert L. Refiti.

In Indigenous studies, restoring and refashioning Indigenous foundational ideas is more important than ever. Albert Wendt (1996) began this project for Samoan studies when he reinterpreted the concept of vā in the much-quoted passage affirming the Samoan motto for putting things back in their rightful place, or to act in the right manner: 'ia teu le vā'—to care, to nourish, to embellish the space of relations, in the vā atoa, the totality that encompasses all life forms.

This chapter exposes the spatial characteristics of Papa and the creation of tagata (humans) in relation to the creation of matter. In this spatial exposition, mana, tapu and noa become important concepts structuring the spaces of rituals and the construction of important places within settlements, such as tūlaga fale (place to stand, family compound) and nofoaga (residence) for matai (chief) and the extended clan, marked by the mounding of earth and stones to form a paepae (platform) over which a fale (house) provides shelter. The chapter also presents the idea that what Wendt elsewhere calls 'the ever-moving present' is an important aspect of vā atoa: here, the condition of wā as duration meets its flip side, vā as space extending. Thus, to think of the movement of mavae and tofiga, as it opens and extends out to encompass and order the world, implies an understanding that gafa (genealogy) as a memory archive tethers past and present together as they move through the 'ever-moving present'.

## Vā beginnings: Cosmic emplacement and nofoaga

The *Solo o le Vā* is the Samoan origin chant collected on the island of Manuʻa in the 1840s from the chief orator and keeper of tradition, Tauanuʻu.[1] Samoan origin is determined by the context of cosmic relationships, articulating an idea of place and ground in the exchange between Tagaloa-a-lagi (progenitor) and Papa (procreator). The narrative places things in their first proper order, as a form of cosmic emplacement. In this way, as Edward Casey (1998, p. 7) suggests, the cosmogonic narrative not only recounts events in time 'but also tells of things in place, how things occupy or come to acquire places [as] events in place'. The act of creation sets up a *first place*, so that even the strictest void is related to place.

1 The major sources for Powell's published versions of the Solo o le Vā are Manuʻa chiefs Fofō and Tauanuʻu.

In Samoan and Moana cosmogonies, the void as *nothingness* is not bereft of qualities concerning place, or relationships with other things, but involves dwelling in the 'active scene of creation, the scene of what-is-to-come' (Casey, 1998, p. 18). Te Kore, 'the limitless space-filling void' (Hongi, 1907, p. 114) of Māori creation accounts, is, for instance, not empty, but a plenum filled with unknown entities, or a *water filled world*.

The original Samoan notion of space, vānimonimo (primordial space) has similarities with Casey's use of *place*, as the context in which the work of creation can begin (Hongi, 1907). Vānimonimo is made up of two words: the prefix vā, which describes a period, space or gap between two or more things, and nimonimo, meaning unknown and out of sight (Pratt, 1893). When understood as a quality that is present at any point in the origin of the universe, vā in vānimonimo (like the Māori Te Kore)[2] is the primordial place where the work of creation can be located and extended. The nineteenth-century ethnographer Edward Tregear (1891) defines Te Kore as 'the primal Power of the Cosmos, the Void or negation', which yet contains 'the potentiality of all things afterwards to come'. In Samoan thought, vā and vānimonimo emplace the birth and rebirth of the world as a cosmic event. At the level of cosmology, the work of creation continually repeats and returns, implying an ecology in which all things are interconnected and inherent in the ways in which mavae and tofiga configure the world.

When looking closely at the *Solo o le Vā* and the relationship between Vānimonimo and Tagaloa, Vānimonimo turns out to be the place of creation, from which Tagaloa moves back and forth in an endless circuit. Vānimonimo does not conform to a conventional notion of place: it cannot be defined with certainty (even though it provides a spatial context for Tagaloa to begin the creation process) because it continually emerges and withdraws—nimo, shimmers. Vānimonimo is unreachable by sight (nimonimo means invisible, or too distant to grasp) and, therefore, unattainable to our knowing. A Polynesian etymology of the word nimo suggests active motion: 'move round in a circle' or 'to encircle'. Nimonimo also denotes something shimmering or flickering, moving in and out of sight, appearing and disappearing; nimo is to 'vanish, disappear, out of sight' (Pollex, n.d.). The stars in the night, for instance, have the same qualities

2 For instance, David Simmons (1986) says that 'Te Kore is where the first twitch of life occurs. It is a state of unity a presence which has no regard to time, place, extent or majesty'. According to some Indigenous scholars, Te Kore has a Māori whakapapa or lineage that places Te Kore away from the point of creation, but is positioned, according to Moana Nepia (2012, p. 46), 'within a genealogical continuum linking the past to the present, among the many ancestral figures we (the living) embody'.

of going in and out of sight because they exist in a faraway place. Equally, nimo is an unknown property of an object within proximity (which we may see, even touch, but cannot comprehend). Nimo relates to a sense of wonderment when used to describe the distant sky. Vānimonimo, as a concept of place, is, therefore, a paradox, a location without knowable quantities, always located elsewhere. To give vānimonimo a definable place within creation, one has to imagine it as a virtual cosmic support that holds and secures the work of creation. Tagaloa 'the Unrestrained, or Illimitable one' is suspended in it: 'fealualu mai o ia i le vānimonimo'[3] (Powell & Fraser, 1892, p. 171). Thus, vānimonimo cannot provide a firm foothold, nor a sense of orientation. It is without orientation, as the other name it is known by indicates.

Valevalenoa, too, is associated with things of unknown qualities, which are yet to be given meaning. Vale means 'worthless; unproductive; needless; inactive' (Pratt, 1893), while valevale connotes youthful, childish and untamed. George Turner, a missionary in Sāmoa in the mid-nineteenth century, collected a creation story in which Valevalenoa[4] was a progeny of Tagaloa, whose mother was the 'Queen of earth'.[5] Valevalenoa adopted a boy (head only and without a body) who had fallen from heaven and gave him a body (Turner, 1884). When the boy grew up, he enquired about the whereabouts of his father and was told that his father lived in the east, inland, above and below. Therefore, the child took the name 'All-the-sides-of-heaven', and from him sprang the four divisions east, west, north and south (Turner, 1884).

Valevalenoa and vānimonimo are spaces without cause (noa), without body (vale), without extension or orientation. They challenge our desire to mark, to measure or define, as we cannot describe the conditions constituting valevalenoa and vānimonimo. The terms also express a sense of free and whirling movement (vale in the word ta'avale describes the spinning wheel

3 'Going back and forth in the vānimonimo.'

4 Turner (1884, p. 5) translated valevalenoa simply as 'space', but, as was common at his time, he probably took space to mean a 'linear distant', an 'interval between two or more points, or objects', and also 'a certain stretch, extent, or area of ground, surface, sky' (Murray et al., 1919, p. 496). Valevalenoa commonly describes something without direction, unclaimed or unmarked. It is likely that the meaning of space Turner was trying to convey, and which coincided with the Samoan word, referred to an 'immeasurable expanse', with 'extension in all directions'. See: Murray et al. (1919, p. 496) for the tenth-century English meaning.

5 Turner (1884) recorded that Tagaloa the explorer married the Queen of earth, and their offspring was 'Valevalenoa, or space'.

of a moving car).[6] A relevant image in this context is that of Tagaloa: unrestrained, moving circularly in a vortex (valevalenoa), or fealualu (going back and forth) within and around Vānimonimo. To understand Tagaloa-a-lagi, the progenitor, is to understand the condition of emplacement just before the creation of the world as a continuum, without extension or time, in which Tagaloa-a-lagi spun back and forth in Vānimonimo's embrace.

Vā, then, is the spatial dimension of horizontal relationships connected through a genealogical system, which stems from kinship relations and alliance connections in a hierarchical system. Lineages are prioritised that are closely connected to founding ancestors of Samoan nuʻu (settlements) and itūmalo (ruling districts) (Le Tagaloa, 1997; Leaupepe, 1995). Iʻu Tuagalu (2023, p. 103) articulates the Samoan vā as a circuit of genealogical energy, powered up by prestige items such as ʻie toga (fine mats), high-ranked men and women and sacred faletele (meeting houses):

> the acquisition and circulation of these items are part of the energy flows as they wax and wane through the Samoan universe, pushing and pulling on objects in that universe.

By looking closely at the Manuʻa version of the Samoan cosmogony, *Solo o le Vā*, we can establish a genealogy that articulates the methods by which Samoans make the world with vā, in a connected relational matrix; it also yields a baseline for how Samoan thought engages with the concept of vā/wā or space and time.

Charles Royal proposed, in a 2021 interview for the Vā Moana project, that the understanding of wā for Māori is part of a configuration of ideas that collapses time and space, because when space and time merge in wā, we can encounter Te Kore, 'something oblique and elusive' that exists beyond our everyday experience:

> The use of the word wā is some kind of way to delve into Te Kore, to delve into some kind of portal or door beyond space and time, collapsing them into one. (Royal, 2021)

6 Taʻavale is the combination of taʻa and vale; taʻa has come to mean, in modern use, to roam freely, but Pratt (1893) suggests that it means a party who go to a woman's family to take proposals of marriage, or food taken on such occasions as a present; it also means to commit fornication with a woman. The combination of taʻa and vale therefore relay the meaning of an action that is not done without a reason.

When using the English terms *time* and *space*, though, one has to be careful: the literature on vā and its temporal meanings is dominated by the notion of time as a quantitative measure, whereby events are laid out in almost geometrical space, with the intervals measured from point to point.[7] This has to do with linear *clock time* to account for actions in the world, which became pervasive after contact with Europeans, particularly in exchanges with early missionaries and colonial settlers. Henri Bergson identifies in the West's fascination with time a quantitative shift, corresponding with an attempt at spatialising time to count moments passing before us in the world. Therefore, linear time, divided into portions of hours, minutes, seconds etc., became the means to measure moments (Bergson & Pogson, 2001, p. 107–108). By contrast, time for Moana people is 'multi-layered and mutable'; histories are long and bound to a notion of time that is *deep*, 'matched by narratives, in art and other enactments, that give prominence to the connectedness between human and other living beings, and in which the earth itself is a living force' (McGrath, 2015). Persons are therefore constituted by relations spanning many generations into the past, and they are connected to vast elemental forces, observed in cosmogonies that move at very different speeds to contemporary life. Damon Salesa (2017, p. 101) uses the term 'Island Time' to describe this deep time and long histories, and observes that New Zealand Pacific people themselves are:

> almost like islands and archipelagos … islands … growing and moving on the crest of powerful forces, some dramatic like tectonic or volcanic energy, and some working at a smaller but no less powerful scale, such as the collective effort of formidable life forms like corals.

## Emanation of mana and its spatial qualities

Tagaloa-a-lagi and Vānimonimo's qualities, well beyond human affairs, enable them to attain a potency associated with extra-dimensional mana (power)—a supernatural procreative force that has the ability to implement and manifest itself in lifeworlds; it is also the catalyst for the processes of becoming (Le Tagaloa, quoted in Tcherkézoff, 2012, p. 318). Tupu (to become, to grow and unfold) marks the life processes of mana, which stem from a power or force that is 'beyond abundance', beyond the measurable

7 The Tā-Vā Theory and Philosophy of Reality is one example (Ka'ili, 2017; Ka'ili, Māhina & Addo, 2017).

(Shore, 1988, pp. 138, 140). Tagaloa, the unrestrained and illimitable one, is or wields mana; Vānimonimo, as a place of unknown quantity, has or contains mana. The relationship between the generative world of Tagaloa and Vānimonimo, on one hand, and the human world, on the other, is mediated through mana as an impersonal force. This relation materialises in objects and things, which can be inhabited or organised by mana. People are *moved* to possess or inhabit these objects,[8] thus they become links in a chain of events related to the original mana. I suggest that, in the Samoan world, mavae and tofiga structure the unfolding of mana's influence and potency in the world. Marcel Mauss talks about mana as contained in a person honoured by wealth and authority, a view supported by Roger Keesing (1984, p. 138) who suggests that 'things and human enterprises and efforts are mana'. Mana has an unseen quality (ninimo) that can take up a place, within persons and objects of special qualities, which allows the person or object to emanate an ideal condition.

Mana is defined in the Samoan cosmogonic setting as the *residue echo* or *indivisible remainder*[9] of Tagaloa. This residue or remainder of what took place in the primordial space vānimonimo continues to emanate as an impersonal force that echoes throughout the Samoan world. It manifests itself in the brilliance, or *shining*, of things that characteristically appear as smooth and white (sina) and enchant the viewer. This is achieved by technical virtuosity and highly refined processes of making. Alfred Gell (1996) suggests that these things are embodiments or residues of complex intentionalities, by which technological virtuosity imbues them with enchantment.

8 Alfred Gell (1998, p. 13) called these 'indexes'.

9 'Indivisible remainder' is a term used in psychoanalysis to describe things that cannot be internalised properly and thus they become an excess. It is used here in the sense of something that cannot be exactly divided or structured, articulated or counted by the signifying network (Žižek, 2007). The philosopher Schelling (2006) describes it as a 'ruleless' force lying in the ground waiting to break through. While the indivisible remainder is a force that lays dormant in the ground for Western philosophy, its Polynesia counterpart, mana, is a desirable force that saturates the world and that people try to harness by cajoling and soliciting it forward to be captured and bound-up with tapu. The impulse to create and build things for Moana people is an instinct that calls forth the mana principle, so it can be domesticated and be 'buried' within the everyday.

Mana, the general Polynesian conception that conveys the cosmic principle or force, is knowable only indirectly through its efficacy and through its manifestation in things.[10] Marcel Mauss (1972), who linked magical practices to the impersonal force characteristic of mana, described it not as a mechanical force, but as a 'mysterious milieu'—an environment and context that functions differently from our expectation of the empirical world. Mana works across time and space, independent of measurable coordinates. Mauss (1972, p. 138) writes:

> Mana is … seen to be something both mysterious and separate … an action of a certain kind, that is, a spiritual action that works at a distance and between sympathetic beings. It is also a kind of ether, imponderable, communicable, which spreads of its own accord … functions as a milieu, which in itself is mana. In its actions and reactions there are no other forces involved apart from mana. It is produced in a closed circuit, in which everything is mana.

Directly or indirectly, mana is tied to divine powers that have been described as genealogically transmitted (Goldman, 1970, pp. 9, 26), as a psychic dynamism that can affect the human word, or as a force channelled through religious rituals (Hanson, 1987, p. 426). In general, mana's visible effectiveness emphatically underscores associations of nobility and status. Handy (1927, p. 27) describes mana as a primal cosmic force, 'not merely power of efficacy, but procreative power, derived from an ultimate source and diffused, transmitted, and manifested throughout the universe'. Marshall Sahlins (1981, p. 31) observed that, essentially:

> mana is the creative power Hawaiians describe as making visible what is invisible, causing things to be seen, which is the same as making them known or giving them form. Hence the divine mana of chiefs is manifest in their brilliance, their shining.

The connection with the world of high-ranking chiefs and aristocratic family lines enabled the world of Tagaloa and the ancestor gods to exert effective influence on the world of tagata (persons). The highest and most sacred of titles in Sāmoa, for instance, inherited qualities from Tagaloa's world that are all associated with light as a shimmering effect, abundance and generative powers. Mana is known generally in Sāmoa via the effect and cause of pa'ia (to be dazzled)—people and objects 'not touched by work'

10 See: Codrington (1891, pp. 116–127), Firth (1940), Keesing (1984), Mauss (1972), Shore (1988) and Wagner (1987).

(Pratt, 1893), or by what is 'considered sanctity' (Tcherkézoff, 2008, p. 254) or 'sacred-divine'.[11] As a more specific equivalent of mana, which emanates from persons, paʻia, in the Samoan context of aliʻi paʻia (paramount chief or holder of titles connecting to the ancestor gods), refers to being dazzled by a person's presence or charisma. In return, we become mamalu—sheltered and protected as a form of dignity.

The shimmering of paʻia also occurs within the fono, a congregation, or gathering in a circle, of aliʻi (chiefs) and tulāfale (orator chiefs). In this context, paʻia relates to the collective gathering in the alofi sā (sacred circle). The aliʻi and tulāfale face each other in a circle, along the edges of a fale tele. From this facing emanates a special collective power, which is commonly known and addressed as o le mamalu ma le paʻia (dignity and sanctity) (Tcherkézoff, 2005). Feagai (worship) also means to face, and to attend to, each other; the particle aga can mean the face or the front of a person's body; compounded to agaga, it means soul or spirit. Therefore, the fono is a meeting of souls or essences, which manifest in the body corporate, linked together in the presence of aliʻi. Mana emanates from this gathering, from people with genealogical connections to Tagaloa, who bear the names and titles of ancestors as status objects denoting their office. Importantly, their willing congregation is marked out spatially in their nofoaga (sitting), in the shape of a ring or circle.

Beyond the fono, mana as divine force has also shaped the grouping of nofoaga around the cleared space of the malae. As noted above, the malae in Lagi was the common form of meeting places of the Sā Tagaloa clan.[12] Reflecting this first meeting place of the ancestors, the Samoan village is concentrated around a malae ('ring a' in Figure 1.2) bounded by faletele ancestral houses located at the edge of the malae. Nofoaga (family dwellings) are located within a secondary ring (b) beyond the first; a third ring (c) with houses for cooking and ablution huts forms another boundary, which extends towards the edges of the bush, inland or to the seashore.

11 The word is used to address direct descendants of the highest aliʻi (paramount chiefs) in Samoa. An aliʻi title connects directly to the Manuʻa Tagaloa clan's genealogy, via the Tui Manuʻa (king of Manuʻa) and progeny of Tagaloa-a-lagi. Paʻia, as an effect, describes the power and influence of mana as a cascading force, passing from chief to chief in a line of descent. When we are in the presence of such aliʻi, we take on board his or her mana as mamalu; we become like aliʻi paiʻa (sacred-divine chief).

12 They are Malae Totoʻa (the tranquil meeting place), Malae Vevesi (chaotic meeting place), Malae Auasia (visitors' meeting place), Malae Alamisi (meeting place of desire) and Malae Tafunaʻi (cloudy meeting place).

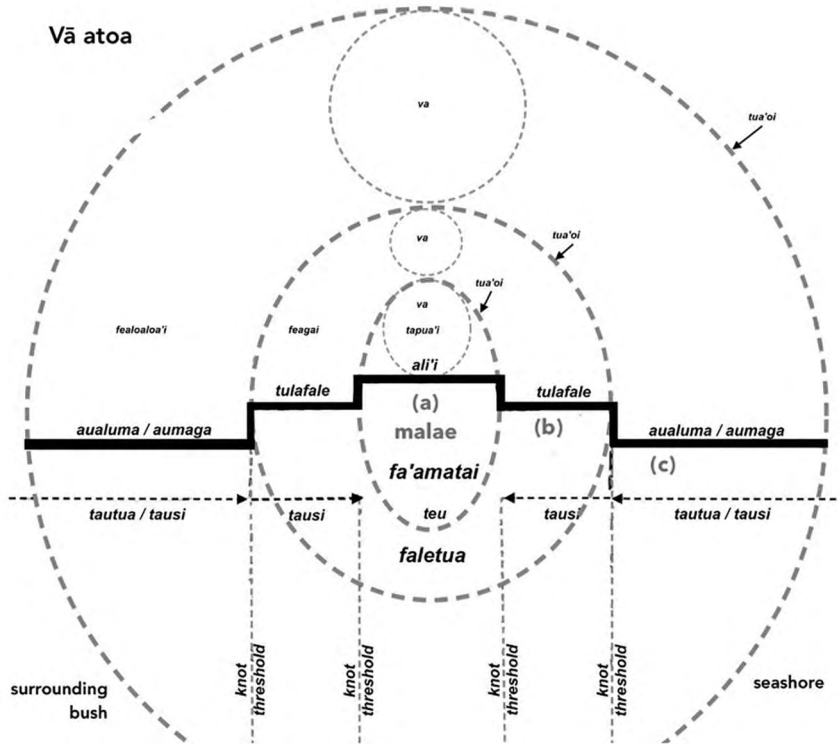


**Figure 1.2: Sectional diagram of Samoan spatial system showing the spheres of influence within settlements.**

Source: Diagram by Albert L. Refiti.

The shape of a village reflects a similarly emanating or cascading structure, where the divinity at the centre is paʻia (ring a), in an empty space, devoid of a body but with an intensive force that Samoans acknowledge, and to which they direct their attention, because of its panoptic power.[13] From this invisible emanation, the aliʻi gains his mamalu (dignity) in a chain reaction that echoes throughout the social structure of the village:

> Every Samoan belongs to a sacred circle at every level. Outside the circle [s]he ceases to exist. The individual does not exist if [s]he has no 'family circle' [the literal translation of aiga potopoto] to belong to. The family does not exist if it is not inscribed at the territorial level in a village circle [nuu, nuu o matai]. If this kind of belonging

13 Paʻia and mamalu are effects of divine power or mana in which those who dwell within the nuʻu (village) are seen and monitored by every community member; paʻia refers to the power of a divine light that sees all corners of the community. See also: Refiti (2009, p. 10).

> is not in place, the individual cannot sit down in a house because every house represents a circle of belonging … [s]he must be able to sit down, and know what post to lean against when his family meets … when a person 'belongs', he knows at what 'place' in the circle [s] he belongs. The same is true at the village level: the matai of a family could not sit down with other matai, he would not know what post to sit against when the circle of the matai [nuu o matai] met to decide village affairs. (Tcherkézoff, 2008, p. 259)

Tagaloa and Vānimonimo form the origin point and *event horizon* of the Samoan world, and generate a force whose indivisible remainder passes to the world of tagata as mana, with the capacity to shine brightly as pa'ia—a quality much desired by men. In Sāmoa, and Polynesia more generally, this divine quality was much sought after, and the need to capture it impacted on the structure of rituals as tapu events.[14] Spatially, these rituals were organised in a circular fashion, around the ringed site of a malae or fono (council meeting). Tapu is commonly referred to as tapui (closure) in Samoa, or sā (sacred, confined). All titles and lineages connecting to the ancestor gods are bundled together under the concept of sā, as closed sacred objects. The family of Tagaloa, for instance, comes under the tapu of Sā Tagaloa, indicating that all who belong to this name are sā. This is why every family is grouped around a titled member, usually with an ali'i at the centre and clan members surrounding and supporting him. These relationships manifest in the form of the family compound, a cascading ring. Persons are therefore literally bounded to titles, and titles are grouped in ringed formations within the nu'u (village), within itūmalo (districts) and at the national level (Shore, 1988, p. 151). The mana emanating from titles and connected to ali'i (an emanation of the 'grace' of the ancestor gods) thus draws and binds people together as a form of emplacement. It creates clans and families as production centres, in which the flow of service and labour adduced from each individual moves things from the periphery of the village to the interior family circles, and from there to the centre with the sacred houses and the malae. Within the circle of ali'i and matai, the objects produced by the labour of individuals are turned into measina and toga (finery), sacred and valuable things, which then flow out again, to the ring of family house and the village, to be exchanged with other families and groups in other centres. Toga (woven fine mats), made by women, for

14 The 'tangling or binding idiom associated with tapu concept turns up as the concept of fa'alavelave literally "to tangle" or "to make complicated"' (Shore, 1988, p. 151).

instance, acquire value only when shown before the family or the village in exchange ceremonies.[15] Food, as a sign of abundance, also acquires mana when it is distributed by aliʻi and matai in exchange ceremonies.

Spatially, the advent of mana triggers the formation of each village centre, in which malae and aiga dwellings repeat the same cascading, repetitive assemblage that has been noted to have a 'holographic fractal' structure.[16] This tendency of mana (as emanation of Tagaloa and Vānimonimo) to form coherent structures, which organise the Samoan world from the pre-Lagi period to the formation of contemporary Samoan villages, is countered by the territorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) associated with the spatial manifestation of Papa (stratum), which untangles Tagaloa and Vānimimonimo. It is as though any ordered system can only be temporarily stable because it is already marked by another, subsequent transformation, eventuating as an unstructured event, which breaks it down so that the order again multiplies in mavaega (becoming).

## Papa and the genealogy of tagata

In Samoan cosmogony, Papa is central to the birthing process of the universe. Papa grounded Tagaloa, who was, until then, engaged in Vānimonimo without extension. The first mavae occurred with seven particles (see a1–a7 in Figure 1.3) reforming to create the first tofiga with Papataoto (horizontal extension), Papasosolo (creeping vine), Papalaʻau (roots and plants), Papaʻanoano (fleshy materials), Papaʻele (blood), Papatu (upright and mobile) and Papaʻamuʻamu (coral and porous flesh).

15 Their values are determined by the potential of the female members of the families to produce children in the future (Schoeffel, 1999).

16 Roy Wagner (1991, p. 163), in theorising a repetitive and partible structure of personhood in Oceania, uses the image of fractals to describe a system that welds the individual and corporate together. 'A fractal person is … always an entity with relationship integrally implied [thus] people exist reproductively by being "carried" as part of another, and "carry" or engender others by making themselves genealogical or reproductive "factors" of these others. A genealogy is thus an enchainment of people, as indeed persons would be seen to "bud" out of one another in a speeded-up cinematic depiction of human life'. See also: Wagner (2001, pp. 3–17).

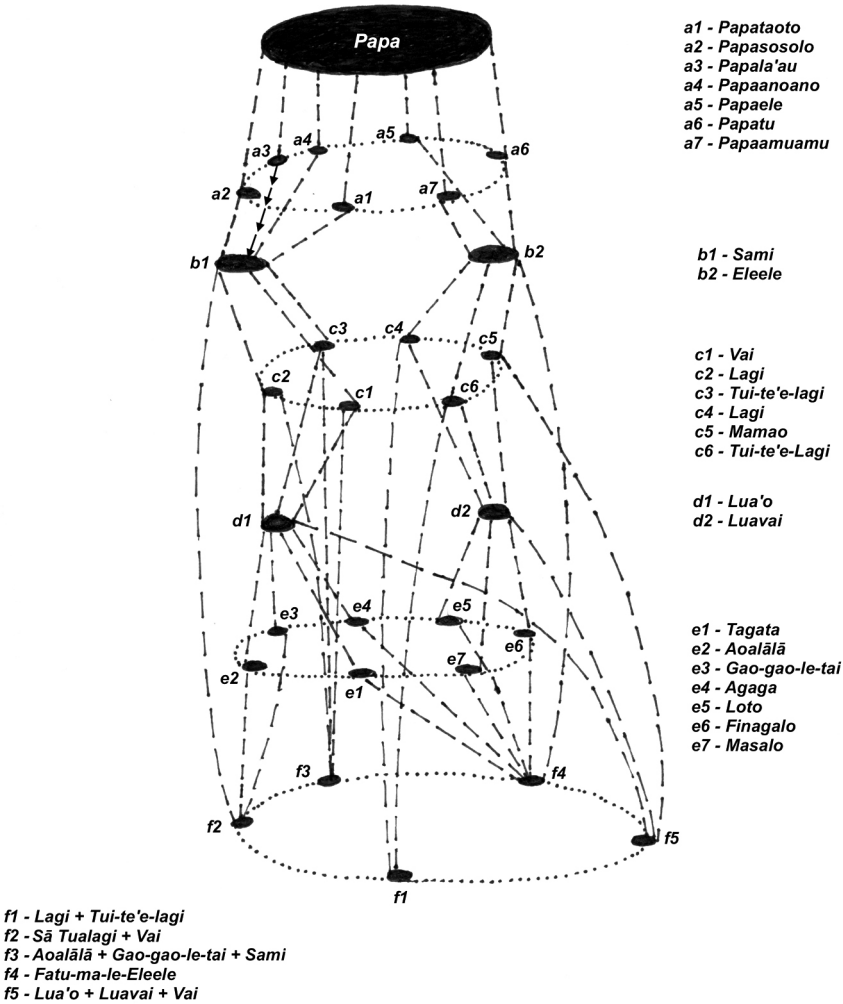


**Figure 1.3: The divarication and differentiation of parts in Papa's birthing process.**

Source: Diagram by Albert L. Refiti.

They are brought into a relation, the first tofiga or fono, by sitting together and forming the first neighbourhood or ʻaʻai eating and communing together. When Tagaloa branched out, from the feet grew Papa, who, in turn, contextualised Tagaloa so that their qualities multiplied. All tagata can trace their ancestry to Papa, whose form and mass provided all the elements in creation. Samoans record these becomings in gafa, oral genealogies that are ritually enounced and structure the matai system.

Papa's genealogy thus takes shape:

Mavae mua (first mavae) – Papa breaks up

a. Tofiga mua (first tofiga): a1. Papa Taoʻto; a2. Papa Solosolo; a3. Papa Laʻau; a4. Papa Anoano; a5. Papa ʻEle; a6. Papa Tu; a7. Papa ʻAmu'amu
b. Mavae lua (second mavae): b1. Sami; b2. Eleele
c. Tofiga lua (second tofiga): c1. Vai; c2. Lagi; c3. Tui-teʻe-lagi; c4. Ilu; c5. Mamao; c6. Niuao
d. Mavae tolu (third mavae): d1. Luaʻo; d2. Luāvai
e. Tofiga tolu (third tofiga): e1. Aoalālā; e2. Gao-gao-o-le-tai; e3. Tagata; e4. Agaga; e5. Loto; e6. Finagalo; e7. Masalo. (The first tagata is born in this configuration.)
f. The differentiation of things in the world begins here when the particles are given tasks that create places:
    f1. Tui-teʻe-lagi propped up Lagi and elevated the firmament and the home of Ilu, Mamao and Niuao. This is where Vānimonimo, home of Tagaloa, is also located in the shimmering place beyond all places.
    f2. Luaʻo and Luavai are given the title of Sā Tualagi, meaning, 'existing beyond Lagi', they joined Vai to give form to all watery elements.
    f3. Aoalālā, Gao-gao-le-tai and Sami join together to form the great ocean.
    f4. Tagata, Agaga (spirit), Loto (soul), Finagalo (understanding) and Masalo (doubt) combine with Eleele to form the first anthropomorphic human couple, Fatu (male) and Eleele (female).

The above schema describes mavae moments in the cosmogony as sequences of movements and divarications from the period of creation (a), the moment when Tagaloa and Papa can be described as a *singular one*. At this moment, Papa cannot be shown directly. But then, Papa became differentiated into many parts, *multiple ones*. In Figure 1.3, periods of rampant growth and scattering are at intervals interspersed with episodes of reconfiguration and alignment of the multiple, until we reach the first tofiga. Thus, the origin, as a cosmogenic event, is characterised by an alternation between mavae (rampant growth) and episodes of tofiga (consolidation); the process of becoming is interspersed with moments of refolding, redistribution and recombining.

## Papa and matter

Papa is designated in the cosmogony as a stratum, a steady ground on which Tagaloa can stand. The indefinable world belongs to Tagaloa and Vānimonimo, whereas Papa establishes lines that connect and encircle the world, a place where creation takes place and from which to extend. In the cosmogony, Papa allowed Tagaloa to find a foothold in the world, an orientation towards all corners of the earth. Previously, as an omnipresent being floating in Vānimonimo, Tagaloa was able to see and be everywhere, all at once; however, Tagaloa therefore lacked the orientation of up or down, left or right. With the advent of Papa, Tagaloa gained orientation and thereby acquired a face. Papa, who branches out and extends, can replicate via its qualities that spill out and form spaces and worlds. By comparison, Tagaloa's immobility and inactivity denote a sense of completeness and self-sufficiency that generally characterises Polynesian deities and their descendants.[17]

The descendants inhabit the middle ground or plateau (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 22), the moa (centre) where motion is intense like a vortex, and where things are pulled into the core and held in an orbit. This is why they need a territory to operate; the formation of things with divine qualities needs an amorphous will to point and direct where a territory is to be made. Tagaloa's tofi (command) points and appoints, directs and influences—it is a mana-like force. Yet, one can sense already that Papa, in the background, goes about dissolving and dividing the borders of Tagaloa's territory. If this sounds like a dissolving force, it is important to remember that Papa has tangible and material qualities: water, air, solid, liquid and gas, and aggregates of 'rock, soil, sand, mud, clay, oil, tar, wood, minerals, metal, and above all, the various tissues of plants and animals are examples of environmental substances' (Gibson, 1986, p. 19). Deleuze (1994, p. 5) suggests that matter 'offers an infinitely porous, spongy, or cavernous texture without emptiness, caverns endlessly contained in other caverns'. He imagines every possible matter in existence, from the smallest to the largest, as a 'world pierced with irregular passages, surrounded and penetrated by an increasingly vaporous

17 Valerio Valeri (1985, p. 147) pointed out that the highest point of etiquette in Polynesia was not to move: 'Laziness for a high-ranking ali'i is a duty, not a vice; it is a manifestation of his absolute plenitude, of the absence of any lack, and moreover, of perfect self-control. The prescription of immobility helps explain why divine ali'i do not walk but are carried; moreover, this custom reveals that ali'i belong to a realm above (heaven) as opposed to the below, represented by ground'.

fluid'. If there is a picture of a totality, it would be of a cosmos 'resembling a pond of matter in which there exist different flows and waves' (Deleuze, 1994, p. 5).

In Samoan thought, these are almost exactly Papa's qualities, which generate the divaricating and porous structure that enables extension and growth. There is a paradox in the notion of a foundation that becomes steady when it divides and extends. The concept of place in Samoan thought is equally about the ability of place to guarantee a location, for the ancestor and descendants to dwell together in a place, and the ability of a stratum to be extended or transplanted and repeated elsewhere.

These qualities appear and manifest themselves in the world of men, in the fuaʻiala and nuʻu, and also in persons, and form the heart of a Samoan personhood or alaga (nested) system. The constellation of a person is constituted of seven parts, sitting together in an alofi sā (sacred circle). Each has to loop outwards in an orbital movement to enable it to relate to the others within the ring, the particle making up the personhood. From there, the person connects outwards—from the aiga loop to the fuaʻiala/nuʻu, the itūmalo and the malo loop. This spatial exposition works like a fractal, where each particle or loop mirrors every other stage of the system—from macro to micro and vice versa.

The constant movement and iteration between mavae and tofiga never stops. It is an integral part of the flow between Lagi above and Papa below, in which faletele become the bridge across which the cosmic flow enters from above and expands as it lavelave (ravels) with social reality. Papa becomes memorialised in the raised paepae of every ancestral house, on which are admitted those who gather in the fono, to meet and commune with the ancestor gods. The roof of the fale built above the paepae is inscribed with a diagram of Lagi, making the house itself a cosmogram.

## Conclusion

This spatial exposition draws out the spatial characteristics of the Samoan origin story Solo o le Vā, and especially the genealogy of Papa that gives rise to the creation of tagata and is inevitably linked to the creation of the first materials. It also explores the timeless dimension of things in the Samoan world, where things are not measured in terms of their quantum effects

but by their efficacy in the world, that is, by recounting the sequences of their mavae and tofiga that allow the Samoan world to obtain moments of a steady state.

When laying out a spatial exposition of the Samoan cosmogony, it is crucial to assess the role of time in understanding vā. Time as wā, in the intertwining of cause and effect, was present at the origin of the Samoan world. Albert Wendt suggests that it is part and parcel of the ethics of teu (care), combined with the ever-moving-present. This mode of time has—as Charles Royal, Brett Graham (Chapter 2, this volume) and Anne Salmond (2021) have indicated in our discussions about wā—the form of a double helix spiral. Thus, the takarangi (Māori double spiral) is a visual representation of a dimensional system from which we can access all other pasts and presents as we travel through time, and an image corresponding with the ever-moving-present that Wendt pinned to his exposition of the vā in 1996.

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