

# The energising of vā: Beyond the social

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# Briefly:

***Vā***

- (i) space between
- (ii) space
- (iii) relationship (Pratt, 1862; Milner, 1966; Papali'i, 2010)

**Energetics**

the properties of something in terms of energy

**Samoan worldview**

how Samoans describe/experience the world

**Social**

# Vā

2 basic dictionary meanings over 150 years

(i) space between

(ii) to rival

## Vā in the Samoan village

Aumaga

Tamaita'i

***Matai  
Alii/Tūlafale***

Fanau lalovaoa

*Tausi ma  
Faletua*

Adapted from Aiono (1997)

(see also Fofō, 2002; Simanu, 2001)

### Many types of vā:

*Vā o alii ma tūlafale* (chiefs)

*Vā o mātua ma fanau* (parents and children)

*Vā feālofani* (fraternal)

*Feagaiga* (brother/sister)

*Vā feāloaloa'i*

**SOCIAL SPACE**

*Vā tapua'i*

**SACRED SPACE**

### Values:

*Fa'aaloalo* - respect

*Alofa* - "love"

# Vā feāloāloa'i and vā tapua'i



National Park Service. (2017, August 18). *Village matai meet inside a fale (Samoan guest house)*. Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/articles/samoa.htm>

# ***Vā* in the diaspora**

Albert Wendt  
(1996)

Important to the Samoan view of reality is the concept of *Vā* ... *Vā* 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 contexts change... A well-known Samoan expression is '*ia teu le vā*.' Cherish/nurse/care for the *vā*, 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 *vā*, relationships. (Wendt, 1996)



# Diasporic Samoans

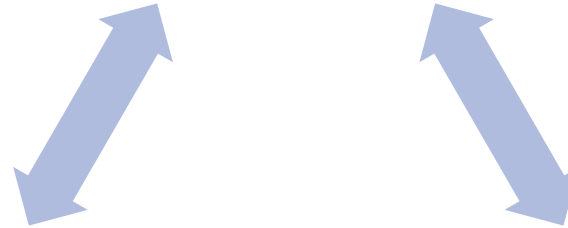


Samoan community feeling helpless. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.stuff.co.nz/taranaki-daily-news/news/2927537/Samoan-community-feeling-helpless>

# Va tapua'i and social agency



Fa'amanuiaga  
Blessings



Social Action



Recognition

1. Va feāloaloa'i (Social space) has to be activated
2. Va tapua'i (Sacred space) has to be activated
3. Sacred and social space are complimentary

(Tuagalu, 2008)

# My views on *vā*

*Vā fealoaloa'i*

*Vā tapua'i*

(Tuagalu, 2008)

Social space

Sacred space

Constantly on

Turned on by invocation

(Tuagalu, 2010)

*Vā* as action at a distance

(Law & Rennie, 2015a; McRae, 1952)

(Tuagalu, 2008)

Sympathetic magic

*Vā* as magical contact

(Frazer, 1967; Mageo & Howard, 1996)

Contagious magic



## **Vā-field**

A region in which a body experiences a force as the result of the presence of some other body or bodies (Law & Rennie, 2015b)

(Tuagalu, 2015; 2017; 2018)

## **Vā-forces**

**+ve**

***Mana:*** generative  
***Tapu:*** restrictive  
***Alofa:*** “love”  
(Tomlinson & Tengan, 2016)

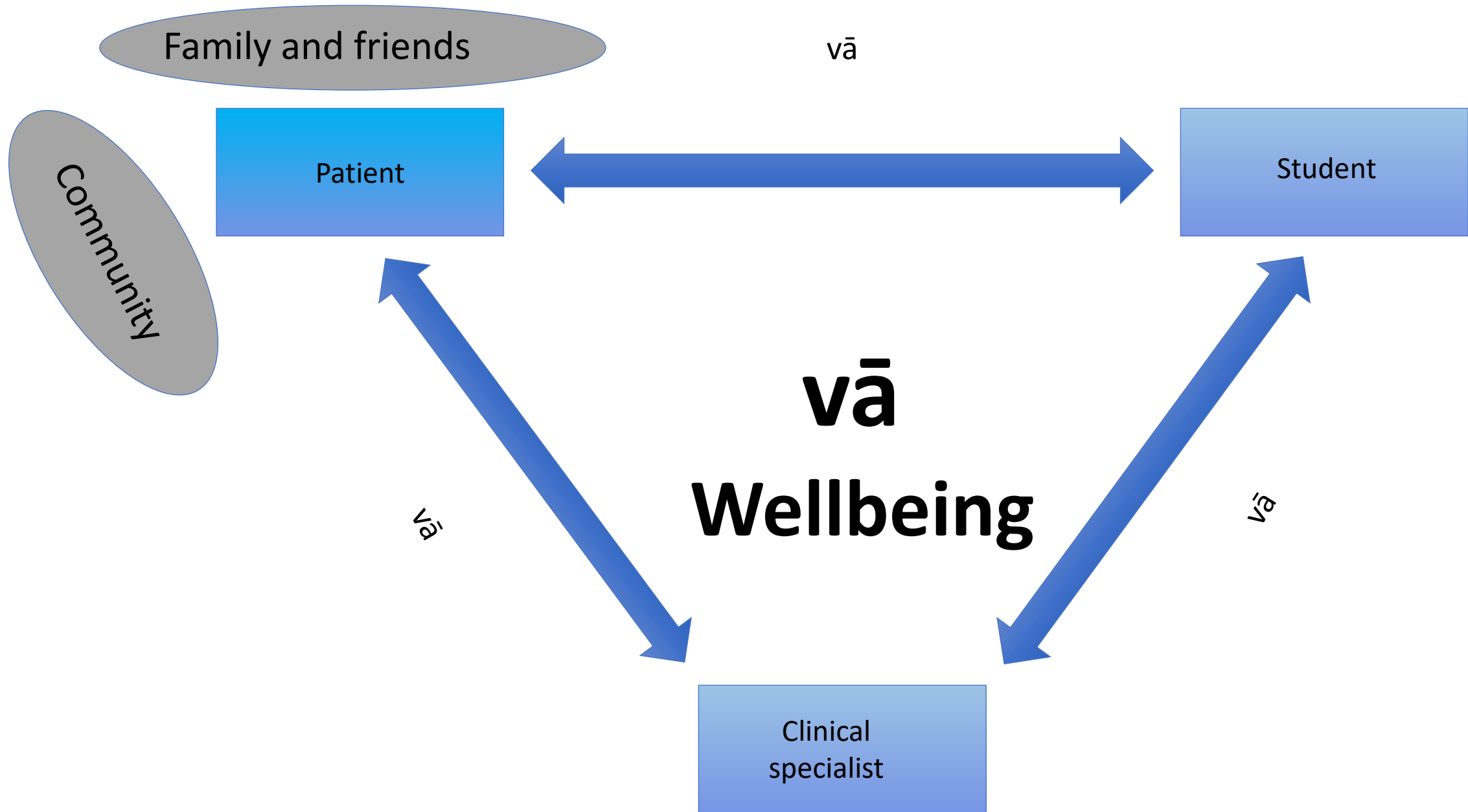
**-ve**

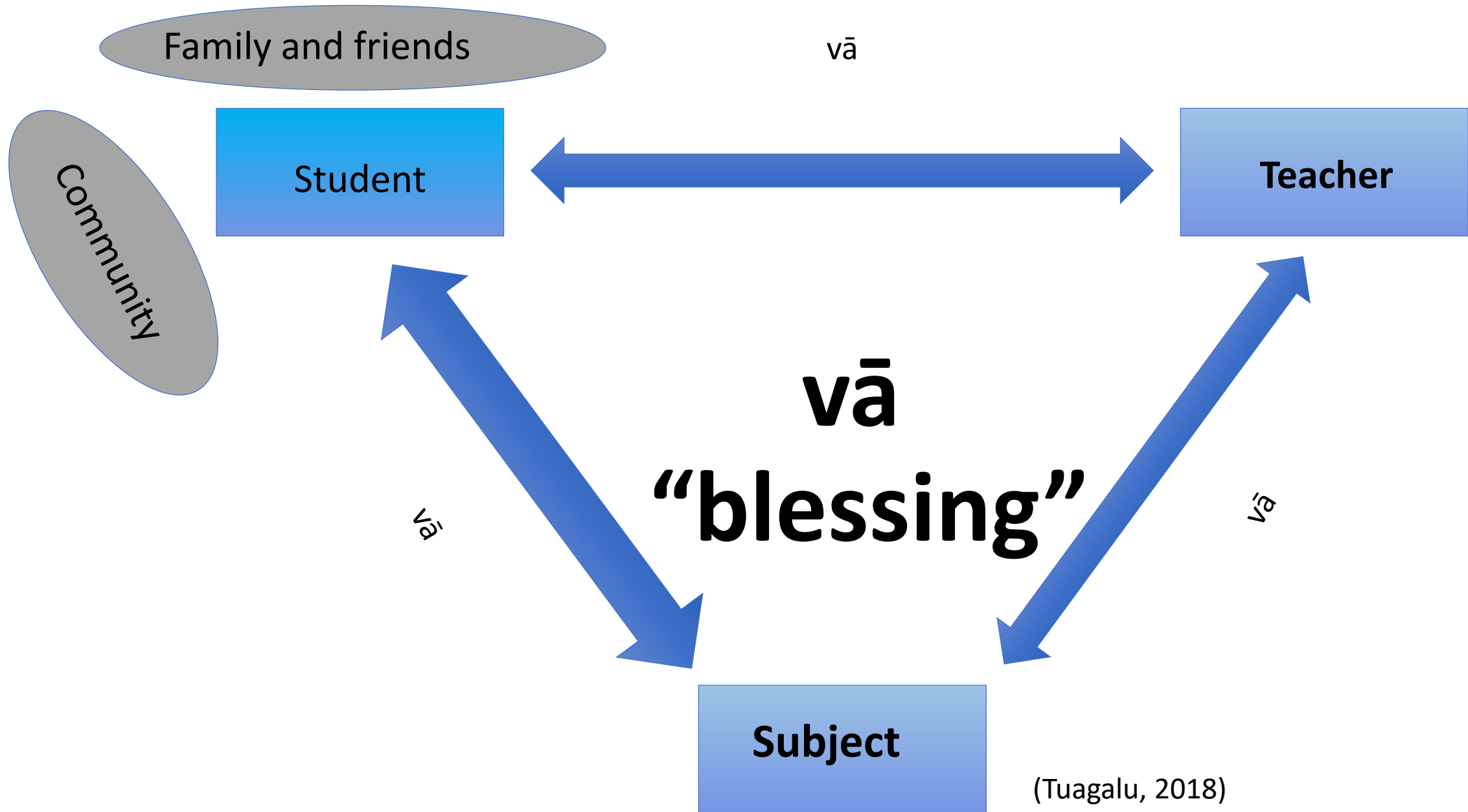
***Mana:***  
***Tapu:*** *fa’amalaia, fetu’u*  
***Alofa:*** *Le alofa*

(Tuagalu, 2015; 2017; 2018)

# Applications of vā

- Communication of medical practitioners with patients
- Teachers and students
- Museums and the materiality of the object



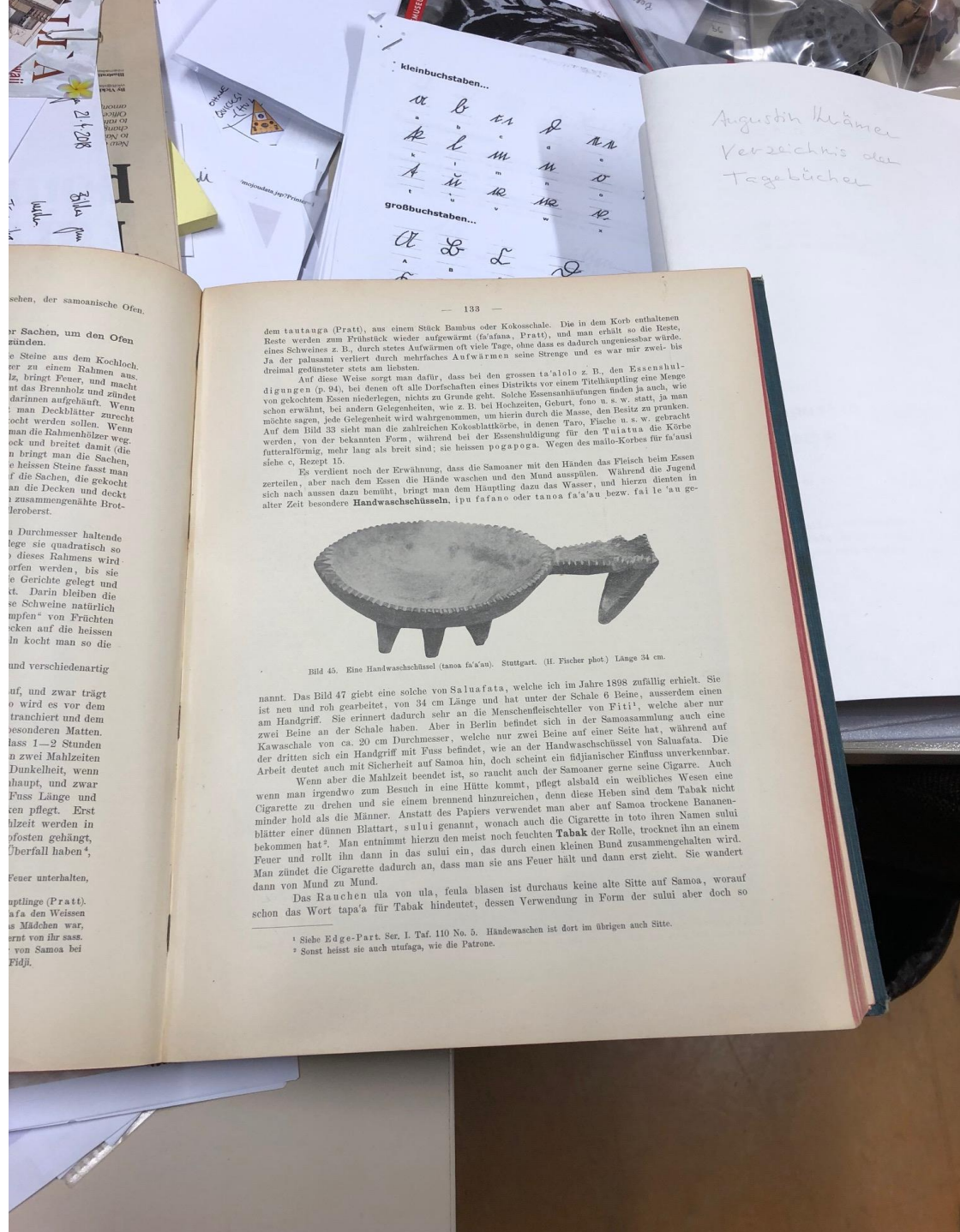


# **Museums and the phenomenology of the object**



# Augustin Kraemer collection (Linden Museum, Stuttgart)





It should be mentioned that Samoans eat meat by tearing it apart with their fingers, but after a meal wash their hands and rinse their mouths. While the young do so outside, water is taken in to the chiefs, in former days, in special hand washing bowls **ipu fafano** or **ipu fa'a'au**; resp. **fai le au**.

Illustration 45 shows one such bowl of **Saluafata** which ***accidentally*** came into my possession in **1898**. It is of recent and poor workmanship....(Kraemer, 1994, p. 152)

On Tuesday morning (16.11.97)

**Salaia** came with farewell gifts (***Abschieds Geschenken***): 1 fishing net, some siapo's fans, titi etc... In his company were the little **Saili of Aunuu**. In the afternoon **Tulua** came with siapos for **farewell**, at the same time they brought an **ipu fafagu** [...for washing hands(?)] from the **Tangaloa family of Saluafata** (Kraemer diary, 8, p. 132, trans. Ulrich Menter)





That club was carved 200 years ago by **Leiataitimu**, the first chief of **Sale'imoa**. All of it by use of mussels, which took many years. It was used in many battles, and has killed many a warrior and chief, as f.i. **Leaufua**, the paramount chief of Falelatai, **Napitau** of Safata, the two famous Aana warriors **Togafitifiti**, and **Petelemuamua** etc.....(Kraemer, 1994, p. 249)

# Mahaffy Collection (NMI)

Given by **Silei** or **Levei Malo** the **taupoor** princess of **Falefa**.. her chief name was **Fenunuivao'** (AE:1923.105)



Aoife O'Brien. (2017). Mahaffy collection.  
The Author.



The full PRM catalogue entry for 1948.12.1 B reads:  
Accession Book Entry - 'Viscount Harcourt, ... Oxon - Purchased at the sale of his effects held at Blenheim by his orders 2.12.1948 - Samoa **Upon** Island, **Atna** district - Mat of pandanus leaf strips with border of red parrot feathers and a few white feathers Given to Arthur Mahaffy [British Resident, New Hebrides] by a chief named **Salanoa**, nephew of **Mataafe**, sometime "King" of Samoa. Folded once into frame 3' 2 1/2" x 2' 6 1/2" Given to Mrs Harcourt 1914 [no cost given].' Added Accession Book Entry - 'These fine mats ('ie tonga) are worn round the waist as a skirt, doubled so that the technical finishing edge hangs down with the feathers in front. See Te Rangi Hiroa Samoan Material Culture pp 275 - 181 and Pl LIV C.' Related Documents File - On 21 October 1914, Arthur Mahaffy wrote to Mrs Harcourt from 39 Bryanston Street, London. The letter is pasted on the back of the frames of both 1948.12.1B and 1948.12.2B and a typescript deposited in the RDF: 'Dear Mrs Harcourt, I leave two mats for you. A short note as to what they are may perhaps interest you. 1 [i.e. 1948.12.1B]. The cleaner and newer one comes from the **Atna** district of Samoa (Upon Island) and was given to me by a chief named **Salanoa** - the nephew of Mataafe sometime "King" of Samoa whose doings and fate have filled many white, blue and yellow books, and whose insurrection was the theme of Stevenson's book "A footnote to History". Mats such as this were, and are, the most valuable form of native property among the Samoan natives, - they form part of the dowry of all ladies of high degree and are rarely, if ever, sold by the natives - who value them more than anything they have. They are hand-made of course, and without looms, from the leaf of a particular kind of pandanus. They are carefully kept and I have seen some over 100 years old - the old and very fine mats have names - and they all take a long time in the making seldom less than six months and often a year. No. 2 [1948.12.2B]. comes from Tonga though it was almost certainly made in Samoa. It is over 50 years old and has as you will see, been patched in several places. It was given to me by **Fatafehi the father of the present King of Tonga and the last of the line of Sacred Kings or Tin Tonga**. There used to exist in that group a system of temporal and spiritual Kings side by side. The spiritual King was much the greater man and was descended directly from the ancestral Gods, through about 30 generations of man - the temporal King was elected. Tongans almost certainly got the habit of wearing these mats from Samoa which they invaded and conquered about 150 years ago. Tongans always like these mats to appear old and tattered and would never wear a new one. Only the highest chiefs can wear them and on occasions of ceremony. This mat was part of **Fatafehi's dower and he died 2 years ago aged 74** and was married quite young and the mat may well have been old when he got it. They are no "spolia" from Samoa such as a German flag, or the Governor's seal, but such as they are they have an interest and I am happy that you should have them. Please forgive this discursive note but I thought you would like to have some explanations with the mats themselves. I am always most Truly yours Arthur<sup>19</sup> Mahaffy.' [GI 22/1/2002; JC 15 7 2005]

# Questions?

- Does the vā-thinking offer any insights for the Library?
- What is the extent of our vā-field?
- What are the “objects” within the field?
- What are the vā-forces at play?
- Is there an overriding, driving vā?

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# Fa'afetai ma ia soifua

