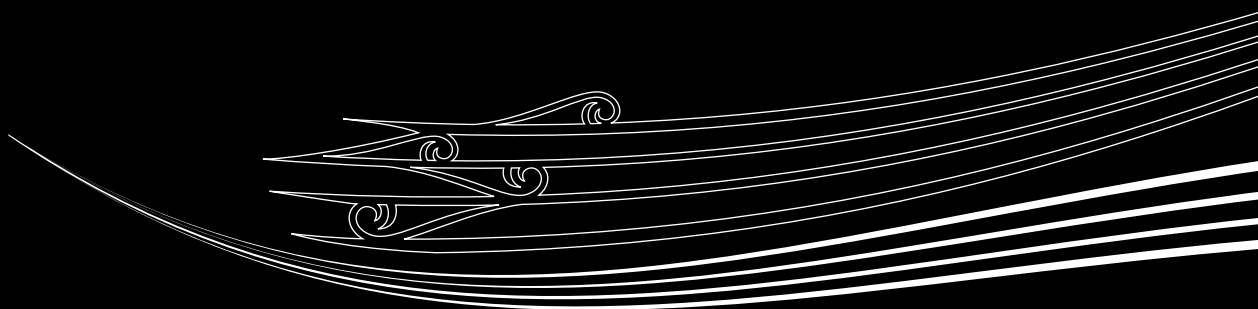




HEURISTICS OF THE VĀ

I'uogafa Tuagalu





Abstract

The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defines a heuristic device ‘as a form of preliminary analysis’ (Marshall, 1998: 274). Such devices have proved especially useful in studies of social change by defining benchmarks around which variation and differences can then be situated. In this context a heuristic device is usually employed for analytical clarity, although it can also have explanatory value as a model. This paper is a preliminary analysis of the concept (and associated concepts) of the *va*. The examination is an attempt at a definition of the concept of *va* and focuses on the differentiation between the *va fealoaloa’i* (social space) and *va tapua’i* (worship space) as developed in the Samoan village. The *va* is also applied to the New Zealand social environment and tertiary education.

Introduction

E sui faiga, ae tumau le fa’avae¹

The *va*, as social and spiritual relations between people, is an important concept in understanding the ways that Samoans relate with one another and the world at large. One can see reflections of the *va* in the articulated cultural practices of other Pacific Peoples, but it would be presumptuous to say that the *va* is a cross cultural phenomenon. This paper, then, is an exploration of the Samoan conceptualisation of the *va*. The distinction between the social and spiritual dimensions of the *va* (*va fealoaloa’i* and *va tapua’i*) is examined. The relevance of the *va* in the Aotearoa, New Zealand social and educational contexts is similarly examined. The question that overarches the purpose of this examination is: ‘*what can the va teach me?*’²

Firstly, let me briefly outline three observations that will act as a framework for my exploration of the *va* and its relevance today:

1. In 2006 AUT had the honour of hosting the Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese for the Office of Pasifika Advancement Public Lecture Series. At the lunch, after the *ava* ceremony, four *Tulafale* (orators) were shown to the main table to sit with the Tui Atua. All four sat one table down from the Tui Atua.

1. A Samoan *alagaupu* (proverb) meaning ‘the practices or forms may change, but the foundations and grounding remain the same’ (author’s translation).

2. In this sense, my use of the term heuristics is along the lines of the Tui Atua’s definition of *toga saili*, a search for wisdom: ‘man reaching out for wisdom, knowledge, prudence, insight, judgement through reflection, meditation, prayer, dialogue, experiment, practice, performance and observance. *Toga* means wisdom. *Saili* means search’ (Tui Atua, 2007: 4).



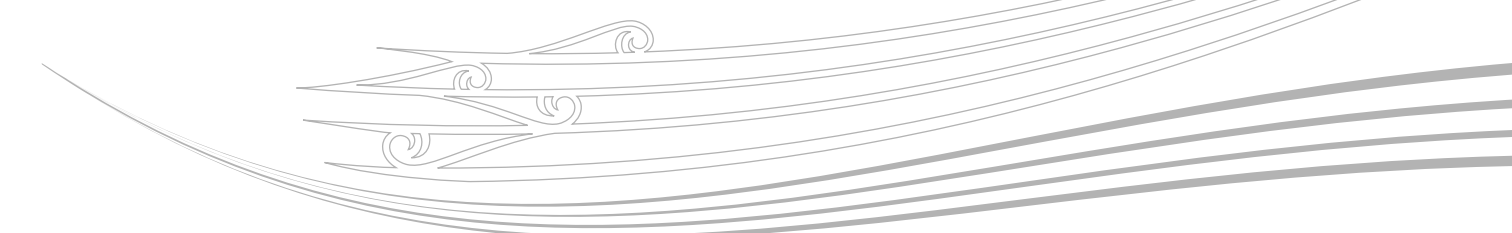
2. A Samoan colleague, who had helped with, amongst other things, the preparation of food for that lunch, remarked the next day, that her father had quizzed her on whether the Tui Atua had been served with china teacups and saucers, whether he had been provided with a bowl of water and clean tea towel to wash and dry his hands at the end of the meal. My colleague was surprised that her father had remembered these niceties after leaving his village in the Falealili region in Upolu, Samoa, over 50 years ago. She joked that, equally surprising, was her father's expectation that she should have known these protocols without ever having been formally instructed.
3. The final observation is a daughter's memories of her father's death:
I remember my father on his last night with us, when I and my family sat around him through the night as he tossed and turned. As we left in the morning with our children to go to school, my father said 'Hurry home after school'. I vividly remember that at 8.45 my husband rang the school and asked me to come home immediately because my father wanted me. I walked down the Samoa College drive, seeing my husband waving to me to hurry, I half ran. At the same time I asked God to keep my father alive until I got home. As I put my foot on the first step of our house, my father called my name. I wondered how he knew it was me who had come home. He wanted to give me and my family his blessings before he passed away, for which I thanked God. My father asked us to have family prayers, and he pulled his sheet over his head as we started. Yes I remember when he drew his last breath immediately after he had uttered a short prayer asking God for forgiveness. He looked so peaceful and happy as he lay on the mattress to await his final bath before being laid in his casket (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996: 113).³

The va : orientational statements

The conceptual terrain of the *va* is vast. What follows are a series of comments that map the intellectual route I will take in my exploration of the *va*. In his article, entitled '*Tatauing the Postcolonial Body*' (1996), Albert Wendt stated his often cited description of the *va* :

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 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).

3. Taken from the story of To'oto'o Puluotu 's story in Fairbairn-Dunlop (1996: 111-124)



Though the article is ostensibly about the Samoan art of *tatau* (traditional tattoo), Wendt is describing a particular world view. He states that the *va* is not empty space, but space that relates and binds entities together. The *va* is space that provides context and meaning to things. These meanings change as the context/relationships change. More crucially, the nurturing of *va* relationships is a direct result of communal culture, where the individual is perceived in terms of the group.

However, the term *va*, defined as ‘distance, space between two places, things or people’, usually appears in phrases which describe the ‘space’ to which it refers (Milner 2003: 307).⁴ So there are many types of *va*. *Va o tagata* refers to the relational space between people; *va feiloa’i* refers to the protocols of meeting; *va fealofani* refers to the brotherly and sisterly love that people should show one another; *va fealoaloa’i*, the respectful space and *va tapua’i*, the worshipful space.⁵

Anae (2001), in describing *fa’asamoa*, that is the rules and emotions that govern Samoan behaviour, delineates two schools of thought: the consequentialists [my term], who concentrate on *what* Samoans do; and the ideologists or culturalists, who view *fa’asamoa* in terms of *why* Samoans do what they do.⁶ Consequentialists interpret *fa’asamoa* in terms of its institutions. Anae lists a few Samoan institutions: *Tautala fa’asamoa* (language), *aiga* (family), *matai* (chiefly system), *fa’alupega* (village chiefly honorifics) and *fa’alavelave* (entanglements).⁷ The culturalist concentrates on exploring practices, behaviour and emotions in terms of central tenets of *fa’asamoa* such as *alofa* (love), *tautua* (service), *fa’aaloalo* (respect), *usiusita’i* (obedience) and *feagaiga* (covenant).

A comprehensive definition of *fa’asamoa* would incorporate both consequentialist and culturalist perspectives.⁸ This understanding of *fa’asamoa* would include indigenous understandings of the structures of *fa’asamoa*, together with notions of Samoan identity based on the relational arrangements of *va fealoaloa’i* and *va tapua’i*. Anae terms this

4. Pratt (1984: 331) defines *va* as ‘a space between’ or ‘to have a space between’. The usual response of Samoans to any query about the ‘*va*’ is: ‘What *va* are you talking about?’

5. A cursory examination of some of the texts used in this study has itemised at least 37 different *va* spatial relationships (Aiono, 1997; Fofu, 2002; Simanu, 2002; Tupua Tui Atua, 2007).

6. Anae uses the term ‘circumstantialist’, I presume, because this analytical approach emphasises the circumstances, the ‘what’, of the Samoan condition. I prefer the term ‘consequentialist’ for, as I will show, the institutions of *fa’asamoa* have implicit ethical norms that are subject to individual interpretation and manipulation.

7. The more appropriate term would be ‘Gagana Samoa’ when referring to the Samoan language. ‘Tautala’ refers to the act of speaking. The term *gagana* also refers to linguistic competency in the various formal and informal language registers.

8. Using Anae’s (2001) terminology, a comprehensive definition of *fa’asamoa* would incorporate both circumstantialist and culturalist perspectives.



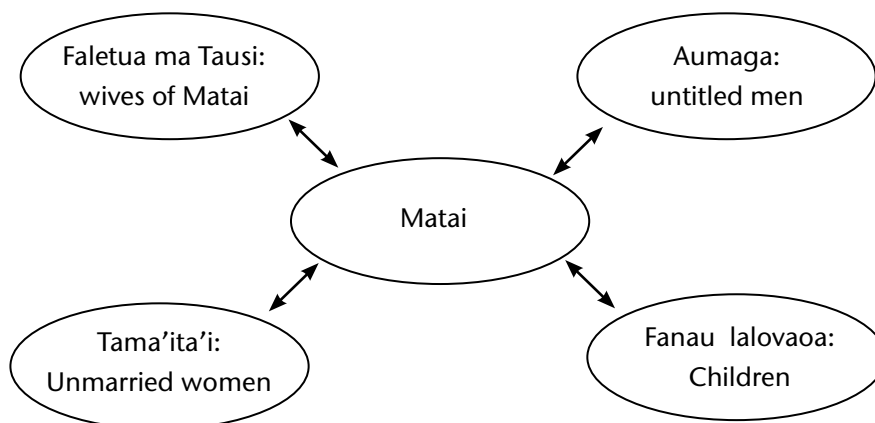
understanding as ‘parental *fa’asamoa*’, which is ‘crucial for parents, island born elders and authoritarian homeland influences’ (Anae 2001: 4).⁹

For the purposes of this paper, the term *va* refers to the *va fealoaloa’i* and *va tapua’i*. It is probably a simplification of the *va*, but there seems to be a distinction between the social spaces that arise from the social organisation, and those spaces that stress the spiritual justifications for that social organisation.

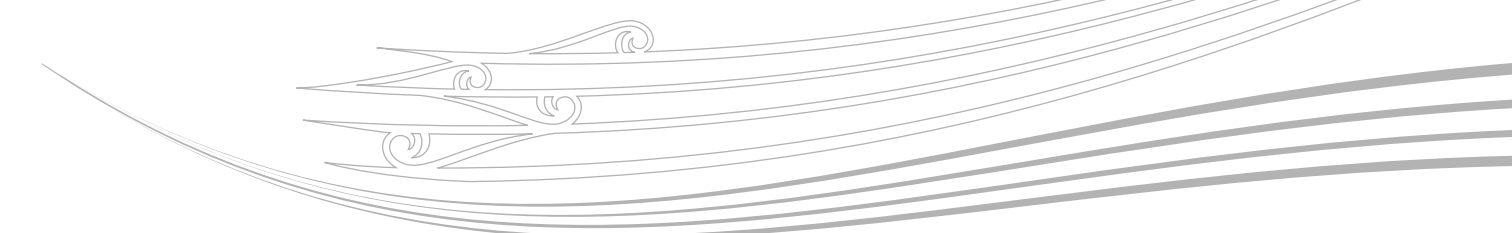
The *va* and Samoan social structure: *va fealoaloa’i*

Aiono (1997) begins her examination of Samoan *fa’asinomaga* (identity) with the Socratic maxim to ‘know thyself’.¹⁰ The beginning of all knowledge (*poto*) is knowledge of oneself.¹¹ She states that Samoan *fa’asinomaga* is founded on three main poles (*poutu toa*): firstly, *matai*, chiefly titles to which one has genealogical ties; secondly, the land (*ele’ele ma fanua*), that is attached to those titles; and, lastly, the Samoan language, *gagana Samoa*.¹² The Samoan language is regarded as the fundamental way in which Samoans differentiate themselves from other Samoans and non-Samoans.¹³

Figure 1. Samoan social structure



9. Anae (2000) outlines three phases to the identity journeys of Samoans in New Zealand: 1. Parental *Fa’asamoa*; 2. NZ born *Fa’asamoa*, i.e., Samoans born in New Zealand which is characterised by the reductionist understanding of Samoan cultural practises as being ‘giving money’ and ‘having to serve’; and 3. Secured *Fa’asamoa* as characteristic of those older NZ born Samoans who have rationalised the positive and negative aspects of parental and NZ born *fa’asamoa*.
10. The Tui Atua (2007) translates the term *fa’asinomaga* as ‘designation’
11. (Aiono, 1997: 1) ...o le amataga o le poto, o lou iloa muamua o oe, ia oe’.
12. See Aiono (1997: 6) O le faletolu lena e mau ai le *Fa’asinomaga* o le tagata Samoa (i) O le igoa matai e tau pe suli iai (ii) O eleele ma fanua e pulea e le igoa matai e suli iai (iii) O le *Gagana Samoa*.
13. *Tautala lelei*, ‘good speech’ vs *tautala leaga*, ‘bad speech’; the honorific language of chiefs and orators; and the continuum of Samoan language ability amongst native Samoans or NZ Born Samoans are a few language based distinctions.



Aiono links these aspects to the divisions (*saofaiga*) of Samoan society which centre around the *matai* (chiefs) of the village; the *aumaga* (untitled men); *tama'ita'i* (unmarried women); the children of all the groups (*fanau lalovaoa*). The *faletua* and *tausi* (the wives of *matai*) are usually from outside the village and represent the strangers in the village (Shore, 1982).

Each of the divisions have set roles, functions and obligations, and these determine the relations in which individuals engage both within and without their social groupings. The *va* is determined by the interplay of the social roles and functions of the individuals engaging in *va* relationships. It is in a village context that people imbibe their *fa'asinomaga*, learn about *va* relationships.

Aiono (1997) stresses this connection between social role, social organisation and geographical location, by the inclusion of her rendition of *fa'alupega*, village honorifics in her publication, “*O le Fa'asinomaga*”.

Tusi fa'alupega

Every village has its own *fa'alupega*, which acts as a charter of power within the village. The *fa'alupega* lists the foundation titles (*suafa fa'avae*) for that village. It contains the names of village founding *Ali'i* (Chiefs) and *Tulafale* (orators). It has been described as ‘a verbal distillate of history and a who’s who of a community, a district and even of “all Samoa” in allegorical language to be recited on the appropriate occasion’ (Keesing, 1973: 74). All other village and regional *fa'alupega* fit within the framework of the national *fa'alupega* (Meleisea, 1987: 86):

Tulouna Tumua ma Pule
Tulouna Itu'au ma Alataua
Tulouna a Aiga i le Tai ma le Va'a o Fonoti

Greetings to Tumua and Pule
Greetings to Itu'au and Alataua
Greetings to the Family in the Sea and
the crew of Fonoti

Tulouna a Tama ma a latou Aiga, po'o
*Aiga ma latou Tama.*¹⁴

Greetings to the sons and their families
and their families and their sons.

There are various compilations of village *fa'alupega*.¹⁵ The best known and most widely used is the *O le Tusi Fa'alupega o Samoa*, published by the London Missionary Society.¹⁶

14. The regions outlined in this national *fa'alupega* do not include the islands of American Samoa.

15. One of the earliest and most renowned compilations was by Augustin Kramer in *The Samoa Islands*, Vol.1 (originally published in 1901). This volume became the main referral text for the Land and Titles Court which was established in 1903.

16. The London Missionary Society issued various publications of the *O le Tusi Fa'alupega o Samoa*. I refer to the 1958 publication.



It lists not only the *fa'alupega*, but also the chiefly *maota* (residences), *igoa ipu* (chiefly kava cup names) and the *sa'otama'ita'i* names (*taupou*, daughters of *ali'i* or maidens' titles).¹⁷ However, these charters are subject to change and manipulation. The only way that one can be sure of having a bona fide version of the *fa'alupega* is to go to the village itself and listen to its current usage. For example, in the village of *Satuimalufilufi*, the London Missionary Society (LMS) version of the *fa'alupega*, as pertains to the *tulafale* title of *Tuagalu*, states (Le-Mamea et al., 1958: 82):

*Tulouna le falelua ma le aiga na pitolua
Tulouna ma lau fetalaiga a Tuagalu.
(A o lo'o ta'u nei o le fetalaiga a Malae'ulu
ina ua le o i ai se Tuagalu)*

Tulouna Meleisea ma Leatigaga

Tulouna oe le Gataiala...

*Greetings to the orator Tuagalu
(at this time the orator Malae'ulu is cited
as there is no Tuagalu).*

However, in the village of *Satuimalufilufi*, the *fa'alupega* for *Tuagalu tulafale* title is:¹⁸

*Tulouna le falelua ma le aiga na pitolua.
Tulouna ma lau fetalaiga a Tuagalu
ma lou Gataiala.*

*Greetings to the two houses and
the family of two parts
Greetings to the orator Tuagalu
and your supporters.*

Structural differences aside, the title of *Malaeulu* is not mentioned in the village recitation (Personal Communication, *Tuagalu Va'aaooa* and *Tuagalu Pulusau*, 2 January 2007). Yet in the 1958 LMS text, *Malae'ulu* is substituted for *Tuagalu*. Why the substitution? The honorific of '*le falelua*' (the two houses) includes the titles *Malae'ulu* and *Fuga*.¹⁹ It seems that when *Tuagalu* is not present, *Malae'ulu* is given speaking rights. In 1956, the then incumbent *Tuagalu* had emigrated to New Zealand – hence, the subsequent substitution (and explanation) in the 1958 LMS publication.

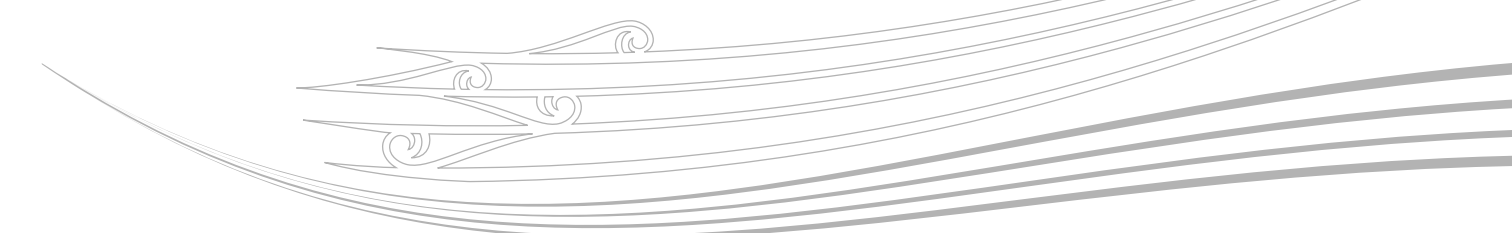
The point here is that, it is only in the village that one hears the correct socially sanctioned recitation of *fa'alupega*. In this case, the insertion of the additional title in the 1958 edition of the *Tusi Fa'alupega* has been reproduced in other publications without explanation.²⁰

17. The residence of the Alii (chief) in a prescribed location in the village is called Maota, whereas the Tulafale (orator) resides in a Laoa. Only maota are listed in the LMS *Tusi Fa'alupega* (Le-Mamea, Teo, Faletoese, & Kirisome, 1958).

18. Recited in the family and village meetings leading up to the bestowal of the Tuagalu title in January 2007.

19. See *Tusi Fa'alupega* Committee (1985: 40) for an itemisation of titles included in the '*falelua*' and '*aiga na pitolua*'.

20. Aiono (1997: 235), substitutes *Malae'ulu* for *Tuagalu*. Tanuvasa (1997: 15) does not include *Tuagalu* in his listing of the main titles for *Satuimalufilufi*. In Kramer (1994: 204) [1901], *Tuagalu* does not appear in the *fa'alupega* for *Sagafili* (*Satuimalufilufi*). It would seem that much depends on the informants for each of these publications.



The concept of *tuao'i* or boundaries is also very important to notions of relational space. Fofo (2002: 11) writes about land boundaries in the village, to describe social boundaries. He states that vigilance in maintaining (*tausia*) good relationships and its boundaries is a tradition from time immemorial. The proverbial imperative '*Aua e te si'i le tuaoi*' (literally, 'Do not lift the boundaries!') implies that even if there are no fences (*pa*), 'you and everyone (in the village) know where the boundaries lie, as they never change'. Presumably, the owners would work the land in terms of tending it and growing produce. The proverbial expression (*alagaupu*), '*Se'i toto le niu i le tuaoi*' ('A coconut tree is planted on the boundary'), clearly demarcates one's plot of land from another (Schultz, 1994: 49).²¹ Traditional land boundaries are also subject to social sanction, as knowledge of land boundaries are also in the keeping (*tausia*) of the village. Land *tuao'i* are not clearly defined, but are maintained by all people in the village. So the maintaining (*tausia*) of good relations within the village becomes paramount.

However, boundary disputes do occur despite the village sanction. Firstly, as *tuao'i* are ill-defined, they are subject to encroachment. Secondly, regardless of village sanction, it is the individual who decides, for whatever reason, to encroach land *tuao'i*.

Social *tuao'i*, like land boundaries, are similarly dependent on village sanction, in that one learns how to practise and nurture *va* relationships in the village. However, social *tuao'i* are ultimately subject to individual interpretation. People, who have had the same socialisation processes, are more likely to choose similar socially acceptable courses of action, but this is not necessarily so. Far from being written in stone, *the va between people is a negotiated, interpretative and shifting space*.²²

The terms *va* and *tuao'i* have been used interchangeably; the Tui Atua notes that the difference between the two, is one of perspective: one talks about the *va* between themselves and others. However, one (or a third party) observes and comments on the *tuao'i* between other people (Tui Atua Tupua, Personal Communication, May 6, 2007). This distinction highlights the intimacy surrounding *va fealoaloa'i*, as it describes the insider viewpoint of a *va* relationship.²³

21. Schultz (1994: 49) notes that this *alagaupu* 'was used to introduce some complimentary remarks about the previous speaker, if the latter was a high chief or an orator of rank'. Hence the *tuao'i* between one speaker and another is clearly marked.

22. See Tui Atua (2007) for a brilliant and illuminating discussion on the shifting social *tuao'i*/boundaries and their effect on the Land and Titles Court in Samoa.

23. I thank Dr Tamasailau Sua'alii-Sauni for this observation.



The spirituality of the *va*: *va tapua'i*

Thus far, we have examined the *va* in terms of social structure and the social space that is entailed. This section will examine views of the *va*, which accentuate its spiritual underpinnings.

The notion of a Samoan relational self was developed by researchers into Samoan mental health. Participants in the study found that the Samoan concept of Self only had meaning in relationship or interaction with others, not as an individual. 'This self could not be separated from the '*va*' or relational space that occurs between an individual and parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other extended family and community members' (Tamasese et al., 2005: 303).

Furthermore, Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, and Bush find that participants recognised that the *va* has spiritual underpinnings: 'Within the *va fealoaloa'i* (particular relationships of mutual respect) there exist *tapu* and *sa* which define by way of ... etiquette how one might relate to one another' (2005: 303). So Samoans tend to define themselves in terms of their sacred obligations to family and community.

Not surprisingly, Palagi psychologists found these two aspects of the Samoan relational Self as 'cognitively dissonant' (Bush, Collings, Tamasese, & Waldegrave, 2005: 623). Psychologists tend to equate the Self with the individual. As one Palagi practitioner states '... I tend to start from myself when I'm thinking about my sense of self' (ibid., 2005: 623). On spirituality, a Palagi psychologist observed, 'even when we talk about religion, we begin to talk about it in secular ... kinds of ways' (ibid.: 623). Spirituality and religion are regarded as treatment tools or part of the psychological landscape, not as central aspects of Self.

The Samoan spiritual self

The Tui Atua emphasises the spiritual in his examination of the Samoan indigenous reference. His work examines central tenets of a Samoan world view and their relevance in today's world. In pondering the concept of peace in Samoan religious tradition, the Tui Atua (2005: 2) stated: 'A search for peace is a search for harmony. There are four key harmonies. They are: harmony with the cosmos; harmony with the environment; harmony with one's fellow men; and harmony with one's self. When all four harmonies come together, there is peace'. The harmony of Self is crucial as it acts as the impetus for the other harmonies'.

He defines the Samoan Self as consisting of three parts: the *tinu* (body); *mafaufau* (mind) and *agaga* (soul). The body is essential for 'core survival tasks such as planting, hunting,

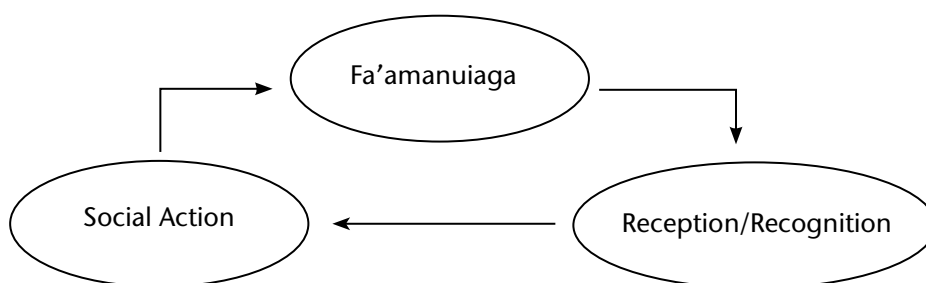
fishing, cooking and martial arts’ (Tui Atua, 2005: 12). The function of *mafaufau*, mind is the discernment of sensory perception.²⁴ The *agaga* (soul) discerns matters beyond those of the senses. Furthermore, just as the mind (sense organs) and the body are nourished by the heart and lungs, so is the *agaga* (soul) nourished by the processes of *anapogi* (rituals of self-denial) and *moe manatunatu* (the chief’s dream dialogue with ancestors).²⁵ *Anapogi* (fasting) clears distractions, so as to allow undisturbed contemplation. *Moe manatunatu* allows the chief to seek ancestor’s assistance with vexing problems both personal and communal.

Fa’amanuiaga and social action

Fa’amanuiaga (the blessing of an elder or Chief) is the epitome of achievement. It is the recognition of worthy service or action. Aiono (1997: 54) states:

A fa’amanuia mai se tagata matua, tusa pe e le aiga pe leai se faia, e ta fa’alogo atu lava ua ta manuia. E talitonu fo’i la tatou tofamanino, o le fa’amanuiaga lea e le gata ina manuia i mea o le olaga nei , ae poto ai e tautala; e iloa ai mafaufau ma fai tonu lelei; e ola ma filemu ai lona aiga, ana fanau ma le nu’u.²⁶

Figure 2. The cycle of fa’amanuiaga



24. The centres of sensory perception are in the head: ears, eyes, nose and brain. This proverbial expression shows the function of Mind: ‘O le faiva o le mafaufau o le fa’atonutonu ma le fa’asoasoa’ (‘the function and the purpose of mind is to discern evidence and make good judgements’) (Tui Atua, 2005: 13).

25. Tofa is the sleep or repose of a chief (ali’i). Moe is the sleep of a tulafale (orator).

26. Translation (my own): ‘when an elder blesses me, whether they are a member of my family or have any relation to me, I feel as if everything will be all right. In our philosophy, the effect of fa’amanuiaga is not just limited to everyday things, but with it comes the gift of speechmaking, discerning thoughts and clear decision-making and peace in one’s family, children and village’.



Fa'amanuiaga are conferred by elders, who have the discernment to recognise the worthiness of the action and person. The recipients recognise the significance of conferred *fa'amanuiaga*, even though they may never have actively sought such recognition. So, a Samoan theory of action can be outlined. Socially worthy action leads to the *fa'amanuiaga* conferred by an elder, which in turn leads to appropriate cultural reception of the blessing and to further acceptable action.²⁷ This is only possible if all the actors share the same understanding of the *va* relationships that are being enacted.

The highest form of *fa'amanuiaga* is the *mavaega* or last will. A death bed statement is rife with symbolism and drama. The chief/elder knows of his impending passing and, in gathering family members around, the elder passes to them thoughts and blessings for the future of the family. The elder has lived his/her life in preparation for and up to this moment; the recipients have similarly lived their lives in preparation for this moment; though their lives will continue, it will be fundamentally affected by the blessing.²⁸ The *fa'amanuiaga* is 'breathed' into the recipient and is of vital importance to the future of the family.²⁹ It is the last act of the elder/chief in service of the family. For the recipient, it is recognition and reward for good service. It acts as a balm to the soul and a spur to future action.

Social connection and spiritual agency in the *va*

Le Tagaloa (2003) notes that the term *Tapua'i*, means worship.³⁰ She states that the term is usually in the form of an imperative: *Tapua'!* Worship, is a command. She defines *tapua'i* as the 'worship of God for the good of someone else' (Le Tagaloa, 2003: 49). When someone is congratulated for the successful completion of a task, the usual response is '*Malo le tapua'i*' or 'thanks for the support, prayers'.³¹ The supporters' prayers are seen as essential to the successful outcome. The worshippers and the person for whom they are praying, are in 'magical' contact with one another, even though they may be geographically distant.³²

27. Conversely, the reverse is true; socially unacceptable action may lead to *malaia* (curses). For example Tupuivao lost his inheritance to the Tui Atua and Tui Aana titles when his mother disowned him (and his forebears). He would not come to her deathbed preferring instead to hunt pigeons, even though she summoned him three times (Kramer, 1994: 280-81).

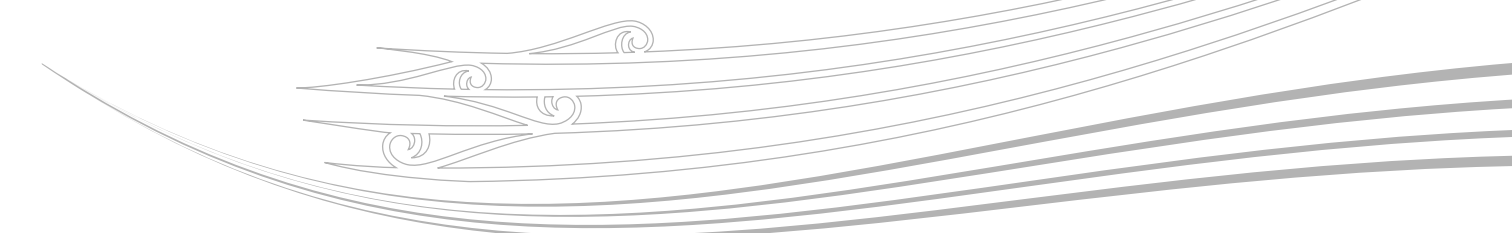
28. The example of King Fonoti, who in his *mavaega* ameliorated his disaffected half-brother Toleafoa and sister Samalaulu, thereby securing undisturbed succession for his heirs and peace for Samoa (Kramer, 1994: 264-69).

29. The phrase '*feula le fa'amanuiaga*' means to breathe one's blessing into the mouth of the recipient.

30. The term '*tapua'i*' in its present usage, refers to Christian worship and prayer. However, it has a much older tradition of usage. It is this usage that Le Tagaloa (2003) is trying to recapture.

31. For example, Samoan speaking sports people, such as the boxer David Tua, never fail to thank the '*au tapua'i*', the supporters, or more precisely, 'those who are praying for a successful outcome'.

32. Frazer (1967: 49) describes contagious magic (one of the two branches of sympathetic magic). The other is homoeopathic magic as 'the notion that things which have been conjoined must remain ever afterwards, even when quite dissevered from each other, in such a sympathetic relation that whatever is done to the one must similarly affect the other'. So, elements in the *va* are bound together by contagious magical threads, whereby they can affect one another even though they may be spatially separated



There is a sympathetic connection between the participants in *va* relations that acts upon them at a distance. Samoan examples abound: The person who prays (*tapua'i*) for the safe return of journeying relatives; the sister who feels that something is wrong with her brother and has to be at his side; the 'dream dialogue' of a chief with his ancestors; and the mutual sense of duty and obligation that tug at the *tulafale* and *ali'i*.

The *va fealoaloa'i* and *va tapua'i* are not opposite ends of a relations continuum. Rather they are closely entwined. All socially defined *va* are divinely sanctioned and participants in *va* relations are bound together by threads of cause and effect.³³ The spiritual connections are fundamental and seem to underlie and act as foundation to all permutations of *va* relations between people.

The *va* in Aotearoa, New Zealand

The examination of the *va* has concentrated on spiritual and social aspects. I have argued that the conceptualisation and practice of the *va* has its origins in the Samoan village setting. Also the emotional and mental foundations of the *va* are firmly set in the Pacific settings, far removed from the shores of Aotearoa. This section will examine the *va* in the New Zealand context. I will examine shifts and changes in the practice of *va* relations by firstly examining the results of a survey on Pasifika student financial hardship at a New Zealand university.

In 2003, a study of Pasifika student financial hardship at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) was conducted (Togiamua, Tuagalu, & Henning, 2004). It aimed to study the linkages between Pasifika student financial hardship and academic success. About 169 AUT students were surveyed on three areas. First was demographic data which comprised the 'reality' of their financial situation. The second section of the report surveyed students perceptions about their financial situation; the student's perceptions should correlate with their financial reality, i.e., if their reality shows them to be financially stressed, then they should have perceptions which show that they are financially stressed. The last section would consist of student's academic passes and fails, and would assess the impact of their financial situation on their academic results. The study failed in its primary purpose of

33. The notion of spiritual agency has a long intellectual tradition. The seventeenth century chaplain to Charles II and Fellow of the Royal Society of England, Joseph Glanvill (1636-1680), argued for the existence of witches and spirits, primarily from the standpoint that to dismiss witchcraft and supernatural agency will lead to the denial of the existence of God. He states (1682: 21-22): 'that Nature for the most part acts by subtle streams and aporrhoea's [effluvia] of minute particles which pass from one body to another. Or however that be, this kind of agency is as conceivable as any one of those qualities ignorance hath call'd Sympathy and Antipathy, the reality of which we doubt not, though the manner of action be unknown'. This is an attempt to outline the ontological status of supernatural connection utilising the newly developing scientific method.



providing a link between financial condition and academic performance. Questionnaire design deficiencies rendered unintelligible the data collected for Section 3.³⁴ However, Sections 1 and 2 of the study revealed some interesting ‘facts’.

The mean weekly income for the sample was \$170 (n=135);³⁵ the mean weekly income for those who made financial contributions to their family was \$180.47 (n=98); the mean financial contribution to their family was found to be \$96.81 (n=133); and the mean weekly income for those who did not contribute financially to their family was \$137.94 (n=35). There is considerable financial stress in the reality of the Pasifika student. Our sample group augmented with part time work their student loan income of (maximum) \$150 weekly. Presumably this time at work would lessen study time. The ‘reality’ of the student, who contributes financially to their family, is even more stressful. The higher income would represent less time for study purposes and their contributions to their family represent over half their weekly income.³⁶ Yet, a high proportion of students did not feel that their families relied on them financially (72/167).³⁷ A majority of students felt that they were financially supported by their families (82/162).

Economic theories based on the maximisation of utility would find Pasifika student’s behaviour to be ‘irrational’. The students were not only acting in a fashion that does not maximise their happiness, but they also failed to acknowledge the fact. That students regard their student loans as a salary, and use the monies to meet familial financial needs rather than educational ends, can be explained by the economic principle of incentives incompatibility.³⁸ The students would be viewed as either misunderstanding the terms of the student loans, or actively abusing the conditions of the student loan.

Clearly, these models do not fully encompass or explain the relationships between the students and their families: the students are regarded as economically ‘irrational’, stupid or duplicitous. I postulated that a better way of understanding the contradictory behaviour was to utilise firstly the notion of the ‘gift’ as devised by Marcel Mauss and, secondly to examine the relationships in terms of the *va* (Tuagalu, 2004).

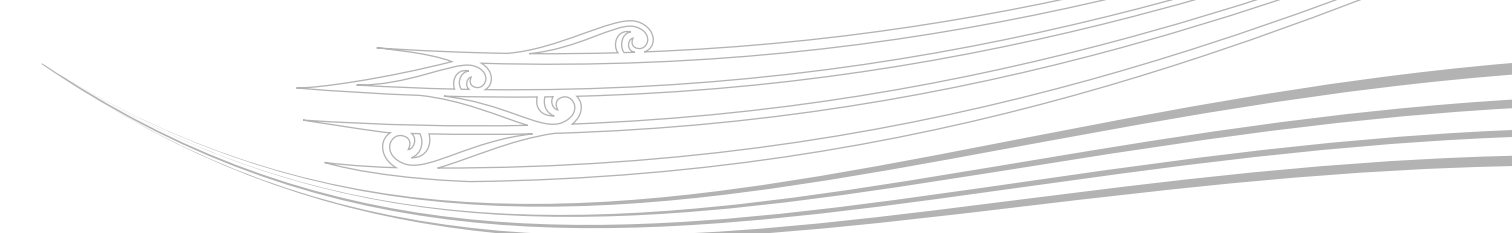
34. Participants were asked to provide from memory their academic results. Many participants left this section blank. Also the wording of questions was sometimes ambiguous. The category of ‘undecided’ in the perceptions section was problematic. It would have been much more decisive to have clear affirmatives or negatives. The data collected was unusable.

35. ‘n’ represents the number of respondents who answered that question in the survey. So, in this instance, the mean weekly income was calculated from a sample size of 135 respondents.

36. Also a high proportion of students felt that they could not afford resources for their courses and transport costs to get to class.

37. Number of participants who agreed (or disagreed) / sample size: those who answered the question

38. See Veryard Projecats Ltd and Antelope Projects Ltd (2003) for a simple definition of incentives incompatibility: ‘Common interest between contracting partners. Where there is no common interest, this is incentive incompatibility’. In this case, the unintended consequence of students using the student loan for non educational purposes, would be attributed to incentives incompatibility.



Maussian gift exchange is characterised by (1) the obligatory transfer of (2) inalienable objects and services (3) between related and mutually obligated transactors. Parties to a gift relationship have an obligation to give, receive and repay the gift (Carrier, 1991).³⁹ The gift is inalienable as it is to some extent part of the person. It bears the identity of the giver and the relationship between the giver and recipient.⁴⁰ In this, the gift is unique as it links the giver to the recipient. Furthermore as the transactors are linked by the inalienable attributes of the gift, part of that relationship entails an obligation to receive and repay the gift in appropriate ways. The gift transactors 'are not individuals, who are defined independently of their social relationships, but social persons defined in significant ways by their inalienable positions in a structure of social relations that encompasses them' (Carrier, 1991: 129). The value of the gift lies in the social relations that it upholds, maintains and augments.

If one regards the student's financial support of their family in terms of a 'gift', then the determining value is not in the money itself, but in the social relationship that the money upholds, maintains and augments. In this case, the filial duty of the Pasifika student is a motivator for their financial behaviour. The very real financial distress of Pasifika households in Aotearoa, and the perception that university education is a privilege, may contribute to the student's perception that they are a drain on the family's financial resources. However, the monies/gift is emblematic of the child's *tautua* (service) to their parents. The parents reciprocate through their continued financial and emotional support, but most of all through their *fa'amanuia'aga* (blessing).

Anae (2000) characterises New Zealand born *fa'asamoa* as dominated by obligations for 'giving money' and 'having to serve'. For young Samoans, at this stage of their identity journey, these characterisations denote their level of understanding of *fa'alavelave* (giving money) and *tautua* (having to serve), i.e., the New Zealand born Samoan's understanding of central concepts of parental *Fa'asamoa*.

The parents, however, learnt their understandings of *fa'asamoa* in a Samoan village. In New Zealand, Samoans are devoid of the village landscapes and structures whereby they would learn the expressions and meanings of *va* relations. Samoan communities in Aotearoa organised themselves around church structures (Suaalii-Sauni, forthcoming), i.e. the church included the Samoan social groupings of *matai*, unmarried men and women, married women and children. It is within the Church organisation, and within the family,

39. This understanding is contrary to the popular notion that the gift as (a) voluntarily given with (b) no expectation of compensation or reciprocation

40. As opposed to commodity exchange where the commodity is alienated because it bears no substantial relationship to the person who sold it (see Carrier, 1991: 123).



that Samoan parents instructed and taught the forms (practices) of *fa'asamoa* or *va* relations. Within the church structures, all the major forms of *fa'asamoa* are practised; e.g., *ava*, *fa'aipoipoga* (weddings), *maliu* (funerals), *folafolaga* (formal acknowledgement of goods) and *lauga* (traditional speeches).

It is my contention that the meanings and nuances of the *va fealoaloa'i*, though not lost, become muffled in translation, For there are marked differences between the village organisation in Samoa and the Church organisation in Aotearoa: The Church does not have a set *fa'alupega*, a permanent geographical location, nor an unchanging population as the membership is transient.

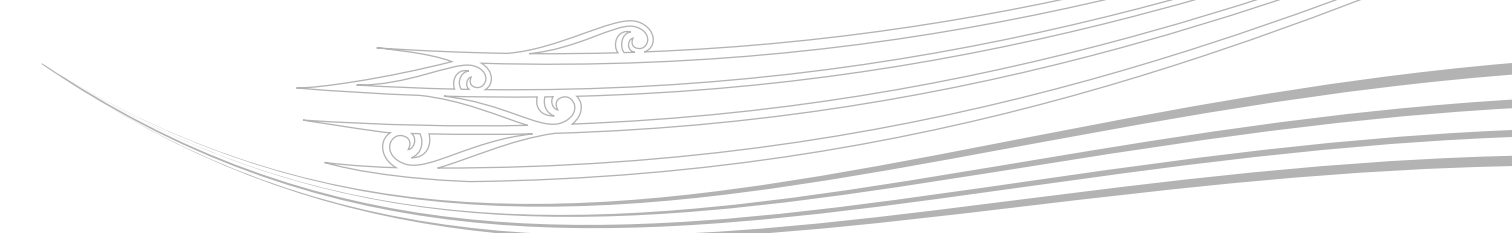
It is not my intention to disparage immigrant Samoan communities in New Zealand; we are fiercely proud of our Samoan traditions and *fa'asinomaga*. However, the distance from homeland villages and living in a cash economy has entailed changes in the forms of *fa'asamoa*.

Samoa is subject to the same forces for change. The Tui Atua cites the case of a young orator who went to court to affirm his *pule* (authority) over the title. He sought legal redress, completely bypassing traditional methods of negotiation and conciliation. Furthermore, he neglected the fundamental characteristics of *pule*: it is earned through the active maintenance of the *va fealoaloa'i*. Furthermore, '*mana* and respect in true *pule* or authority cannot be bestowed on or given by any court' (Tui Atua, 2007: 21).

Discussions on *tautua* (service to family and chief) have hinged on the different forms of service. In recent times, the provision of money and financial assistance has taken precedence in the measurement of *tautua*. This measurement is important in deciding on the 'worthiness' of contenders for a *matai* title. This is, of course, a consequence of living in a cash economy. There is no doubt that families are truly grateful for any financial assistance. However, traditional *tautua* means the regular, day to day service of the *taulealea* to his chief. It is a 24 hour a day, 7 days a week endeavour.⁴¹ How does one measure worthiness? In this deliberation, I would urge '*manatua le tama a le eleele*' ('remember the man of the soil'), the person in the village who tends the family land and keeps the home hearths alight.

Given these factors, change is inevitable. However, I would caution against the instigation or adoption of changes without a proper understanding of what it is we seek to change. Even though the forms change, the foundation or grounding must still ring true.

41. My personal experience was observing the *tautua* of the *taulealea matua* (senior untitled male) of the Tuagalu family. He and his family are devoted to the service of the family, to the extent that they consumed meals after everyone else had eaten, and they ate separately from the main family.



The Tui Atua was asked recently ‘How do we teach our children, who are raised here in New Zealand, respect for their elders when they have lost their culture?’ The Tui Atua replied that the children cannot lose something that they never really had:

The Samoan mother is right in her lament of a loss of ‘culture’ among our young. But that loss is not the fault of the young; nor really is it the fault of the parent or the elder. It is a consequence of a whole combination of factors, factors which brings poverty – poverty of the mind, the body and the soul. The role of the *matua tausi* (elderly), together with parents and elders, was to nurture the mind, the body and the soul (Tui Atua, 2006: 10).

The Tui Atua prompts us to examine the building blocks of *fa’asamoa*. The *matua tausi*, parents, elders, mind, body and soul, all need to be examined, not only in terms of the cultural forms, but also in terms of the social spatial and spiritual underpinnings. In my view, poverty of the mind, body and soul, is a direct result of the attenuation, the withering of the binding threads of the *va fealoaloa’i* and *va tapua’i*.

The va of learning and teaching

An understanding of the *va* provides a different way of conceptualising one’s role of tertiary educator. The teacher is automatically in a *va* relationship with the student. However there is a third party in the relationship. The subject that the teacher teaches is part of the nexus. Education is as a ‘gift’ linking both student and teacher. It is the identification of that subject matter with the teacher that makes it amenable to the student. But the aim of teaching is for the students to form their own relationship with the subject matter.

This, then, is the *va* between teacher and student. Teachers use concepts and tools such as learning styles and critical thinking, and their intimate knowledge of Western forms of learning to enable the student’s relationship with the subject being studied.⁴²

However, Western academic culture is the primary expertise of the academician. Essay writing and critical thinking and other traditional study skills are its cultural forms. However, learning concerns the relevance of those cultural forms to the content, not just

42. This is analogous with the Samoan term *fa’autaga loloto*, ‘the deep view’ of the practitioner. Knowledge in this view, is aimed at the accomplishment of particular tasks. In a traditional setting, *fa’autaga loloto* is the view of the fisherman, the hunter, the *tulafale*.



the forms themselves. If teachers enculturate students to Western learning, then education can be viewed as *fa'amanuiaga*, a blessing.⁴³ It is gifted from teacher to student for future generations.⁴⁴

Concluding comments

I revisit the three observations, which began this discussion:

The *Tulafale* who did not sit with the Tui Atua are fully cognisant of their *tua'oi* even if the boundaries are not immediately apparent. The setting, i.e. the *wharekai* (dining hall) of the Auckland University of Technology Marae, may dictate adjustment of *tuao'i*, but social and cultural markers clearly dictate modes and codes of behaviour. *Tulafale* are aware of the divinely sanctioned social space between themselves and the *Tama'aiga*.⁴⁵

My colleague's father illustrates the persistence of Samoan relational thinking. His question as to whether the Tui Atua had been served correctly was especially poignant, as the provision of *apa fafano* (hand washing bowl) and *ie solo lima* (dry hand towel) is the duty of *taulealea* (untitled males). His expectation that his daughter 'should just know what to do' shows the incomplete transfer of cultural knowledge between parents and their New Zealand-born offspring. Often, their children do not even realise that they are being instructed in cultural forms. This confusion is less likely to happen in the Samoan village setting.

The last observation touches the core of the Samoan heart. *Fa'amanuiaga* and *mavaega* illustrate the spiritual dynamic of Samoan social action. Both father and daughter are captured in a moment of exquisite human significance: Each has lived their lives to this moment; both are aware of its cultural import; the breathed blessing of the chief has consequences for the future generations. With this understanding, tertiary education should be viewed as *fa'amanuiaga*.

43. This is analogous with the Samoan concept of *Tofa mamao* (the long view). Knowledge at this level is to do with the consequences of actions. It is the view of *Ali'i*. True wisdom is the combination of both the deep view, and the long view: *le fa'autaga loloto ma le tofa mamao*.

44. This is not to advocate a form of cultural imperialism, where Western learning paradigms are paramount. Tertiary education in New Zealand is predominantly a Western construct. However, enculturation can be a process by which both educator and student, as social actors, share the same cultural understandings. Many tertiary students find the culture of the University culturally dissonant.

45. *Tama'aiga* are at the pinnacle of the main Samoan family groupings.

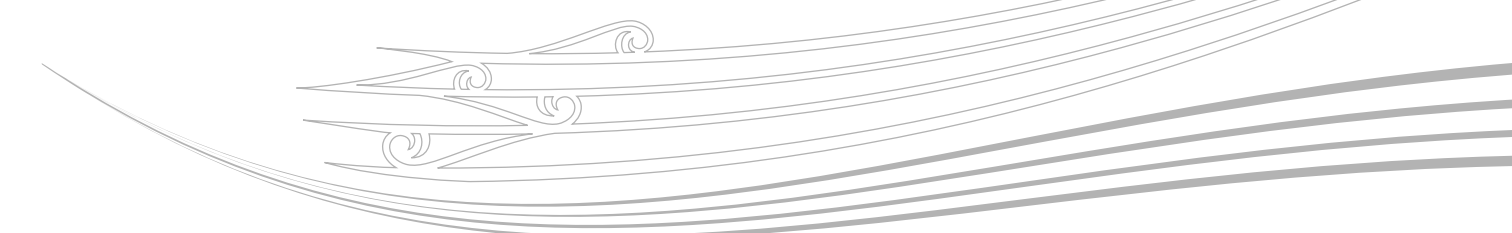


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