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*Beyond “Migration”: Samoan Population  
Movement (Malaga) and the Geography of  
Social Space (Vā)*

*Sa‘iliemanu Lilomaiva-Doktor*

As geographers and anthropologists debate development and migration problems in Oceania, their analyses are complicated by two very different ways of thinking about “migration” and “development.” Despite arguments that Pacific Islanders’ perspectives are useful to understanding these issues, scholarly treatment has almost always been based on a Euro-American model that assumes a local/global dichotomy. This dichotomy is too simplistic in its focus on movement between rural/urban, or village/metropolitan situations and concern with the impact of westernization and modernization on local economies. Local contexts merit serious consideration to better understand Pacific Islander movements. A more balanced approach must include people’s indigenous knowledge and understanding of their movements, as well as the structural, economic, and political environments in which they are enmeshed. In the conventional academic view, “migration” might imply severance of ties, uprootedness, and rupture, but in the eyes of those involved, Samoan population movement is quite different. The Samoan concept *malaga*, usually translated as “travel” or “movement,” implies going back and forth. As I argue, this concept makes explicit both local understandings of migration and the connection of migration to development; it also suggests that the scholarly dichotomies of village/metropolitan and local/global, as found in migration literature, are misleading. The Samoan idea of *vā*, or social space, engages the power within and between spaces and places arrayed in opposition to each other. In examining the indigenous conceptions of mobility (*malaga*) and place, distance, and connectedness (*vā*), I show that Samoans understand “migration” as a culturally informed, historically grounded response to modernity and globalization.

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This paper reports on research conducted between 1998 and 2002 in Salelologa village on Savai'i, the big island of Sāmoa, and its social extensions abroad with members of *'āiga* (extended families) in sites in Auckland, New Zealand, and Santa Ana, California. Fieldwork strategies included multi-sited ethnography, a household census, “home” and “reach” surveys, interviews, life histories, and biographies. The first section of the paper provides an overview of theoretical approaches to migration and spatiality in Oceania (for a longer discussion, see Lilomaiava-Doktor 2004). Next, it highlights findings on indigenous understandings of movement that take into account economic, political, sociocultural, and especially ideological aspects. From an epistemological viewpoint, these more closely capture the meaning of movement as intimately associated with kinship goals, and lead to a deeper understanding of how movement intersects with culture and development. The final section affirms that concepts of “migration” and “development” are particularly Euro-American academic constructions. Their ascendancy and persistence in the social sciences has resulted in the neglect of “alternative manners of thinking” (Chapman 1995, 254). Recognition of indigenous epistemologies and concepts has now passed into mainstream social science, albeit slowly (Gegeo 1998, 2001; Meyer 1998; Smith 1999). I call for a theoretical synthesis in mobility analyses that includes indigenous concepts such as *malaga* and *vā*.

### THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO MOBILITY AND SPACE

Mobility studies in Oceania remain somewhat fragmented and disparate. Rather than amplifying or enhancing our understanding of mobility, scholars have been talking back and forth to each other within “self-contained intellectual domains” (Hayes 1992, 281). The theoretical perspectives that have dominated population movement research in Oceania over the past forty years cluster around three conceptual frameworks: neo-classical, structural, and dependency (see, eg, Shankman 1976; Connell 1980, 1983a, 1983b; Ward 1980, 1989; Ahlburg 1991; Bedford 1997a). A scholarly approach usually applied specifically to Pacific Island contexts is summarized as Migration, Remittance, Aid, and Bureaucracy in the acronym MIRAB (Bertram and Watters 1985). Other theoretical developments include concern with humanism and circulation (Bonnemaison 1981, 1994; Chapman 1978; Rensel 1993). Transnationalism—the globalization of flows of capital, goods, ideas, technology, people, and ser-

vices around the world—has emerged since the 1990s to become a key analytical concept in the social sciences (Basch and others 1994).

While each theoretical approach provides some insight, there has been little attempt to synthesize these intellectual perspectives. Theorists remain overly concerned with fitting societies into their models or holding tightly to a particular philosophy while ignoring any conceptual problems. The positivist and structuralist nature of much of these works, and their assumptions that “migration” is the result of rationalizing economic forces and thus can be statistically modeled, means that they contribute little to our understanding of movement as a social or cultural act. Migration is perceived as just one expression of international inequality, and migrants are seen as passive actors in a game of global labor exchange—the latest raw material to be transported to the “core” countries from the predictably exploited “periphery.” Focusing simply on the international labor market or other economic macro-processes renders migrants and their communities mute, and the beliefs, values, and attitudes they hold irrelevant. It also reduces the world to a unidimensional place where each country must be categorized as part of the core, the periphery, or the semi-periphery (Gardner 1995). Jon Goss and Bruce Lindquist have argued that such economic and essentialist explanations tend to overlook social networks and institutions (2000). I agree with their critique, but further note that the role of indigenous ideology is also ignored. Ideology, when discussed in the literature, is treated as hegemonic, while countervailing forces and indigenous epistemologies go largely unnoticed and unexplained. My goal is to compare a lived reality to theories of migration and development by emphasizing indigenous notions of mobility. Migration and development studies desperately need indigenous perspectives and concepts to enhance understanding of theoretical and practical issues so critical to the region.

Recent geographic literature has shown an increased awareness of the spatial in everyday social life, but more often than not this has been treated as synonymous with the politicization of everyday spaces. In *The Production of Space* (1991), Henri Lefebvre argued that spatial forms are integrated with social practices and processes at all scales of social life, from micro-phenomena, such as daily work or consumption activities, to macro-phenomena, such as the international division of labor. Within this framework, spatiality is theorized as a fundamental human and social dimension—and, as a consequence, a social category. Considering that our theoretical work must capture the generative processes of space, Lefebvre distinguished between *perceived*, *conceived*, and *lived* spaces. *Perceived*

*space*, generated in the dialectic between institutional systems and daily experiences, is the traditional focus of all the spatial disciplines, including geography. *Conceived space* is tied to the relations of production and to the order those relations impose. It is objectively represented in monuments, towers, codes and signs, and bureaucratic and technocratic authoritarianism. Finally, *lived space* is the space of everyday life, the space inhabitants and users incessantly seek to create through the appropriation and modification of their environment. For Lefebvre, lived representational space is alive, qualitative, fluid, dynamic; this concept thus points toward some aspects of the Samoan idea of *vā*.

Lefebvre's critique emerged out of what he considered a privileging of historicity and sociality in specialized fields to the neglect of the spatiality dimension in everyday life. His theorizing about the social production of space has greatly contributed to a shift away from the standard notion of *transparent space*—simple, obvious, and geometric in Cartesian terms—which previously dominated so much geographical, sociological, and anthropological analysis. Still, much of this new spatial language draws social scientists back to familiar dichotomies and the preference for the macro-spatial. Western geographies, much influenced by David Harvey (1989) and Edward Soja (1989, 1996), tend to equate more consciousness of the role of space with urban spatiality and capitalist appropriation in a post-Fordist world.<sup>1</sup> As geographers and other scholars focus on spatial structures of reality, people (who are not the objects of these investigations) meanwhile continue to give physical expression to their locations through habitation and the built social environment. Field enquiries in Lau and Viti Levu, Fiji, led Raymond Young to be critical of the new spatiality in geography, including Soja's work, for continuing to overlook an embodied understanding of movement and the world (1998). Examining indigenous epistemologies highlights conceptual differences between the West and the rest in how space and movement is understood.

## BRINGING INDIGENEITY INTO THE FOLD

Over the last three decades, indigenous scholars from the Pacific Islands have gradually entered the academy, adding important insights and new dimensions to conventional thinking. This new knowledge has become apparent at some cost, with Islander academics such as David Welchman Gegeo (1998, 2001), Manulani Aluli Meyer (1998, 2001), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), and Teresia K Teaiwa (2001) all writing of the ten-

sions encountered throughout a university education when trying to reconcile what had been learned in formal schooling with what they were taught in home communities. Albert Wendt’s “Towards a New Oceania” signaled an emergence from a sense of imprisonment within the spaces delimited by others (1976). He pushed the academic standard of objective and detached analysis to include narratives of movement and place that recognized the relationship between power and knowledge in the construction of identity. He thus underscored the importance of alternative ways of seeing whose origins were rooted in a complex of experiences. Epeli Hau‘ofa’s “Our Sea of Islands” expanded on Wendt’s vision of a new Oceania and advocated inclusion (1993). Whereas the prevailing narratives of the Pacific had focused on small, resource-poor, remote islands scattered “in the far seas,” Hau‘ofa envisioned a “world enlargement” as people in Oceania move within and beyond its boundaries (1993, 7). He explained that “people were unnaturally confined and severed from many of their traditional sources of wealth,” when it was “in their blood to be mobile” (Hau‘ofa 1993, 9). In short, he called for recognition of the conceptual and epistemological challenges facing mobility research. Hau‘ofa and Wendt went around the prevailing paradigms of scholarship to describe personal journeys through time and mind-maps of movement in Oceania. They opened the way for ongoing inductive studies and biographical and autobiographical narratives of movement as paths to understanding migration.

Over the past decade, the complexity of mobility processes has forced change in conventional thinking. Western scholars have increasingly drawn on writings of indigenous thinkers such as Wendt to highlight the nuances of movement and identity. In the writings of John Connell (1995, 1997), Antony Hooper (1994), Cluny Macpherson (1997), and Gerard Ward (1997), Richard Bedford noted evidence of a shift from past metaphors and images, such as depopulation and emigration, to the “imagery and metaphors of the postmodern turn” (Bedford 1997a, 30). Such authors have responded to what Bedford called the “recent diaspora” of Oceanic people who, over the last forty years, have intensified their movements within the region and to countries on the Pacific rim (Bedford 1997b, 61). It might be assumed that Bedford’s “diaspora” translates easily into the language, ways of thought, and experiences identified in the works of Hau‘ofa and Wendt. Bedford quoted Hau‘ofa’s 1993 article at length, and suggested that the notion of diaspora supports Connell’s 1997 argument that Wendt’s novels illustrate the diasporic nature of identity in a post-

modern world, where Islanders are seen everywhere, without roots or a place to call home. Bedford wrote as though the epistemological challenges posed by postmodernist thinkers parallel those of Islander scholars, but his work more accurately represents an overview of new metaphors positioned in an old episteme, to use Michel Foucault's term (1978). Infusing the language of indigenous scholars into programmatic writing is not the same as critiquing conventional migration and development constructs. This is evident in that none of the works Bedford cited discuss the relationship between scholarly knowledge and local conceptions of movement.

This is not to suggest that Euro-American scholarship does not contain any ideas or analytic tools useful for understanding indigenous conceptions of movement. Foucault's idea of the doubleness of power (1978) helps to explain how power relations produce knowledge about migration and development in Oceania, while the humanist tradition was useful to my analysis of key Samoan metaphors of space and movement. Anne Buttimer's interconnected metaphors of "home" and "reach" (1980), which address the fluidity of mobility processes, people, and identities, are similar to Samoan metaphors for places that are either *i'inei* (here, local) or *fafo* (there, abroad). The interplay between *i'inei* and *fafo* suggests ongoing negotiations of meaning in places of dwelling and reaching. These words are not treated as polar opposites by Samoans, but rather as mutually interdependent metaphors frequently drawn on as people talk about connections and relationships in general.

As I describe below, these and other cultural metaphors provide an important means of conceiving of social experience, since it is through metaphors that discourses are shaped and gain authority (Barnes and Duncan 1992). Other scholars have adopted this strategy. Critical of the dualism of rural/urban or village/metropolitan that dominates mobility studies in Fiji, Raymond Young wrote, "Rather than construct conceptions of movement and identity around places rural and urban, local cultural metaphors expand and redefine people's relationships with one another as they move" (1998, ii). He then analyzed the ways the metaphor of *wakolo* (pathway) governs the web of social relationships in Fiji. Joachim Peter, a native of Chuuk (an atoll state in the Federated States of Micronesia), has argued that localized metaphors of movement and travel have been marginalized through the dominant discourse on migration studies created by elements situated outside of Chuuk. He has shown that the metaphor of *ppaileng* (horizon) more accurately models Chuukese space: "Horizon,' the space 'out there,' is a metaphorical model of space for

atoll peoples with many traditions of travel. ‘Horizon’ is also a dual concept. The horizon is the space within which the islander traveler is located that is ‘strange’ and ‘foreign.’ It is also the horizon as a defined space that locates and brings those strange and foreign forces into the places of atoll residents and across familiar boundaries” (Peter 2000, 253). “Horizon” as metaphor for understanding Chuukese notions about travel is rooted in ways of knowing that conceive of people’s movement as constantly fluctuating between the familiar and foreign but with the overarching goal of enhancing the *pei*, or household.

### SAMOAN METAPHORS OF MOVEMENT, SPACE, AND PLACE

Although *malaga* and *vā* are the focus of this paper, these concepts can only be understood within the context of a group of cultural metaphors that constitute *fa’a-Sāmoa*, or the Samoan way of life. Samoans understand “culture” as everyday, lived *fa’a-Sāmoa*. Important dimensions include the *‘āiga* (kin group), conceived of as *tino e tasi* (one body) and *toto e tasi* (one blood), and principles of *tautua* (service), *fa’alavelave* (obligations), *alofa* (love, compassion), and *fa’aaloalo* (respect) in kinship relations. Although place of origin or home (*i’inei*) is an important source of identity from the *fa’a-Sāmoa* perspective, Samoan migrants do not live between two places with no single place to call home; rather, they remain firmly rooted in their identification with their place of origin. These blood and body links are internally related and functionally interdependent, as shown in a discussion of key cultural metaphors.

#### *I’inei*

The term *i’inei* means where one originates from, “this place, home, here and now,” and hence where one belongs. This is the closest Samoan translation of the English words “home and place.” “Home/place” is closely related to *i’inei*, which means local, here, or home. Since the social group with whom one identifies alters according to context, *i’inei* is used variously to refer to nation, region, village, or household. One’s personal *i’inei* remains fixed, however, for it is defined socially as the place where one’s lineage originates. Individuals are tied to their *i’inei* as much as to their kin. Everyone of Samoan descent knows the *matai* (titles), *‘āiga* (kin groups), and *fanua* (land) to which they are genealogically connected and that constitute their *i’inei*. Samoan social identity is firmly based in the corporate ideology of kin group and communal land, *fanua*.



*Fa'a-Sāmoa* conceives of individuals foremost as integral members of 'āiga, irrespective of where they currently reside. The developmental cycle of the 'āiga refers to its social, spiritual, physical, and economic improvement in parallel with the life cycles of the individuals within an 'āiga. Individuals are constantly reminded of their important contributions to the collective welfare. One develops one's 'āiga relationships through responsibilities that are maintained over time.

Young pointed out that in Fiji and throughout the Pacific there is a difference between “being kin” and “knowing kin”: “Being kin is encoded in relations where sibling hierarchy, gender, and age structure social relations while ‘knowing kin’ embodies memories where the distinctions between past and present relationships are both personal and shared” (1998, 298). “Being kin” is not enough—one has to *live* it through participation, reciprocity, and obligation, whether one resides in one's birth village or away from it. One may be part of a kindred, but if not maintained and expressed in *tautua* (service) and *vā fealoa'i* (balanced social space), the 'āiga loses legitimacy. “Knowledge of kin relationships is central, as legitimacy of claims to titles is often subject to challenge even within closely related families” (Young 1998, 299).

The soil of *i'inei* (ie, *fanua* or land) and the shared blood of relatives ('āiga) are metaphorically and literally mixed together. More than simply a physical place or resource, *fanua* expresses wider notions of identity, group membership, and belonging.<sup>2</sup> Individual land plots are less important than general conceptions of *fanua ma 'ele'ele* (land and soil) and *nu'u* (village). Land and home are closely linked, as an intrinsically social concept. Home is where one's family is located, the place where people share the same basic substance (Sarup 1994).

The attachment to an identity associated with home combined with the continuing mobility of people demonstrates the paradox of mobility. Land is a vital factor linking mobility and the 'āiga, because the proceeds of movement are ploughed back into the soil of *i'inei*. This process is continually modified by the enduring contradictions of movement. Although *i'inei* and local relations are always invoked, family members become separated because of movement away from *i'inei*. As mobile as the people of Salelologa appear to be, they remain tied to their village of origin.

The *fanua* Salelologa residents occupy today is an ancestral birthright that has been cultivated by members of the same 'āiga for generations. The meaning of the land on which they live is not limited to a capital resource but is considered a symbol of their ancestry and history. Every household

in the village has land that has been handed down from generation to generation. Permanent change of residence is rare, but *malaga* is a common lifestyle. This paradox of mobility and immobility is represented in daily conversations, as when a senior orator Matamua Pua‘atoga commented during an interview:

No matter where we go, we know that our existence derives from our land. Our land is the center of our collective identity, the places of belonging, our genealogical lineages, roles, responsibilities, and heritage. Land, family, and *matai* are what center us, our sense of identity as Samoans. Our land may be lacking in resources, impoverished, and unproductive, but that won’t diminish our love, care, and respect for our land because land is our gift from God, to care for and cherish. Our forefathers have passed on, but they left these trusts for us to care for and pass on to the next generation. (Matamua Pua‘atoga 1999)

Land is a source of spiritual nourishment and political and economic power among Samoans. In movement, the economic power that is associated with *fafo* is evaluated in local idioms of the spiritual power of *i‘inei*. Land and people must coexist in a mutually beneficial reciprocal relationship. People take care of the land and, in return, the land nourishes its people. This reciprocal nurturing ensures the continued viability of *fanua* and people, evident in the Samoan expression *tausi fanua* (care for the land).<sup>3</sup> Sometimes, one must *malaga* (move) in order to *tausi fanua*. Population movement occurs partly to maintain *vā* (social space, relationships) between kin members *i‘inei* (home) and those *fafo* (abroad) as well as to support family members who remain *i‘inei* to care for family land.

### *Malaga*

*Malaga* is a Samoan verb for “migration,” “movement,” or, more accurately, “travel back and forth.” Since *malaga* is also the polite word for both *alu* (go) and *sau* (come), it implies both visiting and returning, irrespective of duration. *Malaga* works as a noun to describe formal traveling parties of two or more people, that is, a dignified, ceremonial visit following Samoan custom. As one senior woman, Lauesi Logovi‘i, put it in an interview:

Our word for migration is *malaga*; it captures our movements, the comings and goings of Samoans. A *malaga* does not occur out of the blue; there are reasons for *malaga*. A *malaga* is also a noun like a formal traveling group as in *malaga ‘āiga* (family trip), *malaga nu‘u* (village trip), or *malaga ‘aulotu* (church

trip). When a person or family or village sets out for a *malaga* they usually take gifts, cooked food, fine mats, mats, and so on. This is a little donation to help the hosts. The hosts are also prepared to await the *malaga*. There's usually 'ava [a welcoming kava ceremony] upon the arrival of a *malaga*. (Logovi'i 1999)

*Malaga* is also used to describe the spiritual journey of being on earth. *Malaga* therefore has both physical and metaphysical attributes.

Circular mobility between villages or islands and between Sāmoa and American Sāmoa and other sites abroad is commonplace for Samoans. Samoan historian Damon Salesa went so far as to describe the historical significance of *malaga* from the eighteenth century to World War II as a “browning” of the Pacific (2003), when Samoans were actively moving and concerns about national boundaries were virtually nonexistent. Today, large numbers of Samoans and other Pacific Islanders live in the rim countries of the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. Their journeys are not simply movements through space but, like all travels, lead to a reshaping of boundaries and reconfigurations of culture, community, and spirituality, as well as an expanded territorial distribution. This happens because reciprocity between dwelling and reaching is built into *malaga*.

The basis for *malaga* was originally to fulfill life-cycle *fa'alavelave* (obligations). Thus travel was undertaken to seek resources to supply gifts at births, marriages, and funerals. However, contemporary movements for the purposes of education, health, and economic opportunities have broadened its scope (see table 1). During an interview, senior woman Lauesi Logovi'i (LL) explained to me (SLD) the reasons for *malaga*, its customary forms, and recent changes:

LL: [*Malaga*] is always when there is a *fa'alavelave* such as a funeral, wedding, birth of a newborn, dedication of a new guest house, church, a newly tattooed person, religious ordination, to take a son or daughter to live with relatives in order to attend school in Apia [the capital] or overseas, and visits to relatives. The fundamental reason we go on a *malaga* is to demonstrate kinship with relatives where a wedding or funeral takes place.

SLD: What about *malaga* overseas?

LL: Yes, that has occurred also; just about every family has someone there so we have 'āiga there. That means we expand the circle of *fa'a-Sāmoa* and *fa'alavelave* as well.

SLD: Are there *malaga* to Sāmoa?

LL: O yes, there are lots, *‘āiga* (relatives) coming to visit their families, to attend *fa‘alavelave* here in Sāmoa, to be bestowed titles, to attend court cases, church dedication, or visit sick parents or siblings. The goods sought after to supply life-cycle ceremonies have changed as the scope of *malaga* has broadened. In the old days it was mainly productive capacity like taro, breadfruit, pigs, chicken, and fish. Nowadays, these products are still important but they are substituted with bags of rice, flour, tins of biscuits, kegs of corned beef, cartons of fish, including cash. Fine mats are a must. And cash has become an indispensable part of exchanges in *malaga* and in any cultural exchange. (Logovi‘i 1999)

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Table 1. Reasons for Samoan Mobility

Cultural/Political/Economic Event	Purpose
<i>faletautū</i>	seeking betrothal of a <i>taupou</i> (village maiden)
<i>fa‘aipoipoga</i>	celebrating a legally registered church or civil marriage
<i>fa‘ailoagatama</i> or <i>fa‘afaiilegatama</i>	celebrating a baby’s birth
<i>maliu</i> or <i>tu‘umālō</i>	attending a funeral or death
<i>saofa‘i</i>	bestowing a title/investing a <i>matai</i>
<i>umusāga</i>	officially opening a <i>matai</i> residential house or Samoan guesthouse
<i>fa‘aulufalega</i>	officially dedicating a new church, minister’s house, or school
<i>tatau</i>	receiving and dedicating a Samoan tattoo (for men, <i>pe‘a</i> ; for women, <i>malu</i> )
<i>fa‘apa‘iaga</i>	ordaining a minister, priest, or nun
<i>fa‘au‘uga</i>	attending graduation from college or high school

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Source: Fieldwork interviews 1999–2001

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As this senior woman suggested, customary forms continue to have relevance in contemporary Samoan society, yet *malaga* has changed to suit new configurations. Samoan movements not only reflect the cultural ideology of care and support in *fa'a-Sāmoa* but also are intimately associated with the social, economic, and political duties of members.

*Malaga* metaphorically represents the different places Samoans live without inserting them into dichotomies such as rural/urban, Sāmoa/America, or Sāmoa/New Zealand. *Malaga* situates individuals in the realm of their *āiga*. Irrespective of location, those who move are not perceived as “people of two worlds or people of no worlds” (Subedi 1993, 213), but as being simultaneously involved both *i'inei* (home, local) and *fafo* (overseas, abroad). Neither “home” nor “reach” are static places. *I'inei* and *fafo* meet and overlap in various places in the “diaspora” as contemporary population movements maintain the social space, *vā*, between people.

### *Vā*

In 1911, *vā* was defined in *Pratt's Grammar and Dictionary of the Samoan Language* as “a space between.” The word refers to the space between any two loci or entities, including people. In common usage, *vā* connotes mutual respect in sociopolitical arrangements that nurture the relationships between people, places, and social environments. As Wendt wrote, “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. . . . 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, that perceive [of things] in terms of group, in terms of *va*, relationships” (1999, 402).<sup>4</sup>

As Wendt suggested, social space is so important because the Samoan sense of self is ultimately relational or communal, rather than individualistic. A study of Samoan perspectives on mental health and culturally appropriate services in New Zealand reported: “Samoa’s traditions and protocols explain the nature of Samoan being as that of a relational being, that is, the Samoan person does not exist as an individual. There is myself and yourself. Through you, my being is contextually meaningful and whole. Through myself, you are given primacy in light of our collective identity and places of belonging (*fa'asinomaga*), our genealogical lineage (*tupu'aga*), and our roles and responsibilities and heritage (*tofiga*)”

(Tamasese and others 1997, 28). Samoan relationships are holistically conceived within their spiritual, social, economic, and political contexts.

Throughout Oceania, *vā* is a highly complex phenomena and it traverses many Pacific languages. Konai Helu Thaman described the Tongan concept of *tauhi vaha’a* as a foundation for peace and intercultural understanding (2004). She wrote, “Because the cultural identity formation of most Pacific people is relational rather than individualistic, it follows that the spaces or *vaa* between and among persons or between a person and his/her environment must be nurtured and protected” (2004, 32). In efforts to broker an agreement and peaceful talks in the aftermath of the military coups in Fiji, Sitiveni Halapua attempted to refocus leaders’ attention on the Pacific ancestral principles of *vā* (to embellish social relations), and *talanoa* (to engage people concerned in dialogue so that a mutual agreement is reached for the good of all) (Halapua 2003). In short, emphasizing cultural tools of conflict resolution in Island societies, where collective well-being is paramount, points to the need to uphold our moral responsibilities in resolving conflicts. Other recent discussions have focused on the importance of *vā* in understanding Pacific Islanders’ interactions in overseas contexts. Tēvita O Ka’ili outlined *tauhi vā* (nurturing of socio-spatial ties) among Tongans in Maui, Hawai’i (2005). Karl Mila-Schaaf advocated the use of *vā* in social work (2006). ‘Okusitino Māhina delineated four dimensions of Tongan *vā*: physical, social, symbolic, and intellectual (2002). I would add a fifth dimension, the political/ideological. Moreover, Māhina wrote that *tauhi vā* stipulates symmetry and harmony, the mutuality of the performance creates symmetry, and symmetry gives rise to beautiful art and good social space, or *vā lelei* (2004). In short, there is personal and group responsibility to maintain symmetry and harmony in *vā* or *tauhi vā*.

The same is true in Samoan epistemology. American Sāmoa’s former US Congressman Fofō Sunia wrote about the importance of these social relationships in Samoan culture (1997). Melani Anae also mentioned *vā fealoa’i* and *vā tapuia* as important influences on the behavior of New Zealand-born Samoan youths (1998). ‘Aumua Mata’itusi Simanu, a senior woman and professor of Samoan studies at the University of Hawai’i–Mānoa, confirmed in an interview:

*Vā* is the most significant concept to understanding the complexity of Samoan social interactions between people, church, and the environment. It underpins all epistemologies of participation, obligation, and reciprocity that guide

our interactions and continue even as Samoans move abroad. Performance of social responsibilities and obligations prescribed in *vā* rest on the knowledge of social and genealogical connections that ‘āiga members possess. (‘Aumua Mata‘itusi Simanu 2006)

*Vā* characterizes culturally proper and improper behaviors. Food division and distribution, sleeping and sitting arrangements, and language usage in private and public spaces are all conceived through *vā*. *Vā fealoa‘i* (respect between people or people and their environment) is considered culturally appropriate. Vaifou Temese, a senior orator and Samoan culture teacher, explained the Samoan understanding of the “space in between” relates specifically to the social aspects of relationships expressed between ‘āiga (1997).<sup>5</sup> Chief-orator, sister-brother, clergy-village, husband-wife, parents-children, people-environment, or God-people respect relationships are all tangible examples of *vā*.

*Vā tapuia* (sacred spaces and taboo relationships) establishes limits in sociopolitical and spiritual arrangements. Transgressions of boundaries either by physical contact or by the use of vulgar language constitute *vā tapuia*.<sup>6</sup> Village councils (*fono*) may impose fines on those who fail to *tausi le vā* (nurture the social space), which in the most serious violations, may lead to banishment from the *nu‘u* or village (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2004, 229). In an interview, Tina Tau‘asosi-Posiulai, a graduate student and mother of three, living with her husband Tai Posiulai in Hawai‘i,<sup>7</sup> explained that *vā* can be threatened or break down:

Of course, we often hear *leaga le vā* [social relations are bad] or *malepe le vā* [social relations have deteriorated or broken], or *vā lelei* [social relations are wonderful]. When *vā* breaks down, it is often caused by an imbalance when two or more people don’t behave in ways expected of their roles and responsibilities. When reciprocity between two parties is not balanced, this usually takes more than one incident before there is disharmony or a disagreement, which can lead to tragedy if these are left unattended. It can bother you mentally, spiritually, physically [so] that you can’t sleep. When *vā* is at its greatest height, it means those involved have followed correct cultural protocols and relationships are good, there is harmony. (Posiulai and Tau‘asosi 2006)

*Vā* thus governs and guides individual and ‘āiga behavior, inflected by factors such as gender, cultural status, age, and marital status. The social imperatives of *vā* involve work and effort by those concerned to ensure its balance and coherence. Epistemologically, *vā* is encoded with respect, service, and hospitality in maintaining and retaining ‘āiga status and a

socially well-located family. These goals are underpinned by an ideology of participation, obligation, and reciprocation. In this sense, economic power and social power are inseparable.

### MOBILITY AND MAINTENANCE OF *VĀ*

Mobility is closely linked to the enhancement of Samoan *‘āiga*, kin groups, and their associated *fanua*, land. Samoans *malaga* to maintain their relationships, out of common courtesy, hospitality, and caring for the *vā*, the “unity-that-is-all” (Wendt 1999, 402). *Vā* therefore metaphorically delineates the cultural communications and social relations that necessitate mobility. The saying “Ae iloa a‘u i Togamau, ‘ou te iloa fo‘i ‘oe i Si‘ulepa” (If you recognize me in Togamau, I will recognize you in Si‘ulepa) reminds Samoans of the social space that informs their underlying moral economy.

Samoans continually refer to *vā* in explaining their *malaga*, their need to travel back and forth to attend or provide for various *fa‘alavelave*. Those I interviewed from Salelologa explained that they first traveled to advance the home site. Their acts of giving and receiving, as manifested in exchanges of letters, care packages, phone calls, and remittances, symbolized *vā*. In speaking of *vā* between people and places, Salelologa Samoans do not express an abstract intellectual concern but rather assert concrete links, interactions, and transactions that contribute to the contexts of specific places both *i‘inei* and *fafo*.

Interviews with those *fafo* and *i‘inei* demonstrate that *vā* underpins many of the interactions between people in everyday life, including their decision to *malaga* to attend *fa‘alavelave*. Legitimacy and knowledge of one’s kinship relations are at the heart of these interactions, just as Samoan conceptions of movement are intimately tied with social connections. People share and reestablish social links by moving; kinship and other social connections define who travels, when, and where. In an interview, Tina Tau‘asosi-Posiulai (TTP) and Tai Posiulai (TP) discussed with me the necessity to *malaga* in order to maintain their *‘āiga*:

TTP: I believe that the reason we go overseas and why Samoan parents wanted to send their children overseas was to develop their *‘āiga*. On the surface it is economically motivated, but truthfully, what underlies it is because of the concern for the *vā*, our family status in relation to other families and within the village. It is the same thing with how they encourage us in school, so that we do well to help with the *‘āiga*. For example, we just sent a car, [a] used one, for my



family. Although it was not easy, we were driven to do it because I don't want my parents, and by extension my *'āiga*, to be the target of mockery by the village because the previous car is dead. And people will wonder, where will they get a new one? Essentially because I don't want my father to feel humiliated in the eyes of the village, in other words, because I care so much about my *vā* with my parents. I did not want our family status to go down. I was worried about all these *vā*.

SLD: So does it mean we are forced to do these things, then?

TP: Not really, we do it out of our own free will, but we also have principles of *alofa* [love], *fa'aaloalo* [respect], *tautua* [service]. These are God's gifts, but these are also taught to us by our parents. They can be really influential in our thinking about what is moral. If we have lots of *alofa*, our *fa'aaloalo* is also enhanced and this makes us act to embellish social relationships, our *vā*. When *alofa* and *fa'aaloalo* are in symmetry, the *vā* is highly decorated and harmonious. When a *fa'alavelave* happens, we all try to contribute something to it. It is profoundly the *vā* that ensures the continuity and viability of our social, economic, political, and cultural interactions. But this interaction assumes that the other side is also doing their part to make both parties happy. *Vā* is everything. . . . You know we have a saying, "E mativa fesaga'i le Sāmoa" [Samoans face each other irrespective of their economic status].<sup>8</sup> The important thing is your presence, not necessarily what you bring. In the old days, Samoans can go to help with chores; at a *fa'alavelave* you don't always have to take fine mats and money. These days with so much focus on money people are forgetting that, but as the expression says, there is always another time when our paths meet again and maybe at that time you or I, whoever the person may be, will be able to help. (Posiulai and Tau'asosi-Posiulai 2006)

## MOBILITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Movement abroad has a profound impact on the scope and visibility of *fa'alavelave* activities, since at least half their funding comes from overseas relatives. Because access to those living abroad or the opportunity to travel provides capital, a Samoan person overseas can command as much social power as those living on family land. Overseas movement, production capacity, and knowledge of *fa'a-Sāmoa* are all nonmaterial investments supplying what Pierre Bourdieu called "symbolic capital" (1977, 171). Each of these can potentially be converted into economic capital in situations where physical conditions are insecure. Over the long run, developing symbolic capital is often more important than economic capital.

Samoan views of these activities contradict Western notions of develop-

ment as equivalent to rising incomes and gross domestic product. Development scholars assume that “industrial capitalism is not going to be overturned and that modern science and technology can solve all human and environmental problems” (Jacobs 1999, 7). If, as Arturo Escobar insisted, “development is a discourse” (1995, 13), then it follows that scholars should be able to address alternative understandings of development and human betterment. The literature on remittances and sustainable development in the Pacific Islands is almost always framed in terms of gross domestic product, the rise and drop of remittances, and the impact of economic development on island nations. As Young observed, “Scholars continue to see movement as a primarily behavioral response to socioeconomic circumstances” (1998, 60). For example, in the 1970s, economic anthropologist Paul Shankman predicted that sending remittances back to Sāmoa would taper off, the longer migrants stayed away (1976). In the 1990s, he observed that they had not done so, even though, with his emphasis on capital investment, the remittances seemed pointless: “The sums remitted were usually not large enough for investment in large-scale development or capital equipment, nor was there much incentive to invest” (Shankman 1993, 163).<sup>9</sup> In perceiving remittances only in terms of the dominant development discourse, Shankman failed to comprehend circular mobility and missed the importance Samoans give to meeting the everyday needs of families and to maintaining *vā*.

Development for Samoans does not mean replacing *fa’a-Sāmoa* with a rising gross domestic product. Although willing to change and desiring greater material well-being for themselves and their families, Samoans continue to support an underlying moral economy. Elders emphasize that it is always a mistake to adopt foreign concepts without Samoan understanding. As senior orator ‘Asomua Simi told me in an interview (1998), “Development is not foreign to us. We have always wanted to improve our families, but we want to do it in ways that won’t destroy our collective well-being, where we value our social responsibilities to families and friends, [rather] than pursuing development for its own sake.”

Fundamentally, the Samoan way of living is premised on relationship. This view of the lived reality is not restricted to Sāmoa but found in all Pacific Island cultures. As Manulani Aluli Meyer pointed out regarding Hawai‘i, “This is an epistemological point—that relationship is more valuable than the more modern sense of efficacy, money” (2001, 126).<sup>10</sup> In Tonga, ‘Okusitino Māhina has observed, “development was a western concept that was underpinned by the dictation of the time-space require-

ment of the West. But in Tonga we have our own time-space requirement, where we value our social duties to families and friends more than any other. . . . we have the tauhi va, which is the social sense of space, and it is of more importance than money and time” (quoted in Folau 2003).

Similarly, the Samoan terms *tausi le vā* or *teu le vā* (care, nurture, decorate, or embellish the social space) come up repeatedly in conversations about *‘āiga* development and the relationships between those living *fafo* and those living *i‘inei*. ‘Aumua Mata‘itusi Simanu (AMS) discussed with me the cultural imperatives that go beyond economics in maintaining *vā*:

AMS: *Vā* has economic, political, spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions. We can talk of the economics of *vā*: this is why many Samoans go overseas to earn money. Some individuals go to obtain higher education, such as getting a degree so they earn more money to help develop their families. All of these are favorably looked upon, and [are] encouraged. Sometimes, a couple with young children go, usually to educate their children because of the perceived better education and economic prospects. After accomplishing those goals, some Samoans return and believe with the money and knowledge they have acquired they can now rebuild the *‘āiga*. If they return and go through the correct protocols of *vā*, such as consult with *matai* [chiefs] and extended family, everything is smooth sailing, but if they come back and become oblivious to the rest of the family and assume they can just do whatever they want since they are now economically independent, this is where conflicts and problems begin.

SLD: Why and what is the reason?

AMS: Because these members who have returned have disregarded the *vā*. The whole Samoan way of life is premised on relationships and how we maintain this *vā* with others, including our superiors and workmates at work or any situation. It is always a good practice to consult and discuss your plans, especially if building a house or a store. When people who have been caring for the land are notified, everyone is happy and will make sure the plan is executed and implemented to successful completion. Irrespective of your education status and economic status, your cultural knowledge of what is appropriate in *fa‘aalooalo* [respect] knowing the *vā fealoa‘i* [social respect], following protocols of communications will earn you respect. (‘Aumua Mata‘itusi Simanu 2006)

An interview with Pipi Iesi ‘Esera, a Salelologa Samoan in Santa Ana, California, reaffirmed the same sentiment about *vā*:

Let’s use a concrete example. If a parent passes away, the children in Sāmoa and overseas all come and they want to make a better *lau‘ava* [funeral feast]

and some may argue that they should use only cattle and pigs rather than the usual cartons of tin fish. Cattle and pigs are more expensive than tin fish. This is *alofa* [love] and care for *vā*, the *vā fealoa'i*. By going for the expensive stuff for their parent, they have enhanced the status of their family, but also gained some esteem themselves. In *fa'alavelave*, when the relatives, guests, and the village are well fed, family status is elevated. This affirms a sense of belonging and legitimacy among themselves and in the village. (Pipi Iese 'Esera 2000)

Scholars and development experts such as Connell (1990) or Shankman (1976) have often described *fa'alavelave* as a customary practice that squanders economic gains and resources. Blaming *fa'alavelave* for lack of economic development reflects a failure to understand different values and multiple purposes set within this particular cultural milieu. *Fa'alavelave* remain central to Samoan social life in the midst of migration and development because they “are a way to maintain an active connection with relatives, lands, titles, and dignities, they are a support network that will help one in times of need” (Ala'ilima and Ala'ilima 1994, 248).

Unlike business transactions in which making a clear profit is the ultimate goal, in *fa'alavelave*, social, political, and economic goals are constantly intertwined and negotiated. Generosity fulfills social and political objectives even when the immediate result to the individual giver is economic loss. Thus economic power and social power are inseparable. Building status is another aspect of *fa'alavelave*, although not the “supreme or only motivation” as scholars like Alan Tippet have claimed (1971, 151). As seen in Pipi Iese 'Esera's and 'Aumua Mata'itusi Simanu's accounts, Samoans are concerned with retaining family status, honor, and reputation. This competitiveness takes place within a context of social values such as love, respect, and obedience. Parents teach their children these values and have them further reinforced by Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Thus children are expected to present expensive pigs and cattle at their parent's funeral not only as a symbol of status, but also as an expression of their love, respect, and *tautua* (service) for their parent. Based on a study of a community in Savai'i, Susan Maiava commented, “like the status symbol of remittances from overseas, cattle have been incorporated into the moral economy” (2001, 136). In other words, children are nurturing the *vā*, not only with their parents, but also between their relatives, church, and village members.

Cultural meanings of mobility, place, and identity influence people's interpretations of migration, transnationality, and development. The

themes that emerge from these stories about movement and development all focus on support and caring for relationships rather than the pursuit of wealth for wealth's sake. *Vā* has a profound impact on all these because it is linked to personal identity and self-esteem. Development of the *ʻāiga* is an inherent aspect of movement: both moving up (economically) and moving around (between *iʻinei* and *fafo*) is done in order to be Samoan. Rather than emphasizing the pursuit of wealth in their explanations for why they *malaga*, personal narratives evoke *vā*, the space that relates rather than separates. And it is this social space that guides appropriate behavior, acts of reciprocity, and continued links and interactions between people and places. *Malaga* overseas and at home expresses identity in the Samoan social world.

### CONCLUSION: INTEGRATING A GEOGRAPHY OF *VĀ*

Harnessing an awareness of indigenous concepts is not enough, however, unless indigeneity and its concepts are fully integrated into theoretical approaches to mobility research in Oceania. This work has been an exercise where I sought to understand how the people of Salelologa at home and abroad conceive of migration and space, by analyzing the metaphors of *malaga* and *vā*. *Malaga* (movement back and forth) to pay respect and demonstrate kin relationships is crucial to maintaining *vā*, the social connections and relationships of kin members. These and other cultural metaphors anchor ways of knowing and acting that are intrinsically Samoan rather than imbedded in the Western intellectual tradition. The intensive mobility of Pacific Islanders—in this case, Samoans—makes it imperative to reevaluate long-held conceptions that are deeply entrenched in neoclassical and structural mobility research. The indigenous reference necessitates a transcending perspective, challenging the assumption that assimilation pressures of a dominant culture will result in loss of a migrant's culture. This assumption is “by no means neutral but instead is closely linked to concepts that have long been central to hegemonic practices of bourgeoisie-dominated ruling blocs” (Rouse 1995, 357). The melting pot assimilates migrants; the huddled masses become Americans, New Zealanders, or Australians. The conventional view of migration as unidirectional, resulting in a permanent relocation of people in which migrants are seen as uprooted has been challenged. The migration experience can no longer be safely ensconced in macroscopic generalizations.

*Vā* is a deeply imbedded and embodied concept that drives many of the interactions between movers and stayers. *Vā* remains a moral imperative that strongly influences ongoing relationships among Samoans as they move. *Vā* is a way of thinking about self, identity, and place. Implicating webs of social networks, institutions, and cultural ideologies, *vā* has spiritual, cultural, economic, political, and social implications for thinking about place, legitimacy, and belonging. *Malaga* of people and their acts of giving and receiving, as manifested in letters and remittances, all symbolize *vā*. It is therefore social connections rather than geographic boundaries that are central to Samoan conceptions of movement.

In movement, the philosophy of *vā*, the “in between space,” relates and connects people irrespective of geographic and residential locations. *Vā* as it relates to movement yields a more nuanced understanding of Samoan mobility than the usual rural/urban or village/metropolitan binaries found in migration literature. More broadly, it underlines the cultural as distinct from the economic or political domains of movement. It also takes studies of Pacific migration far beyond a concern with moving from the periphery to the core, tightly wrapped as these usually are in notions of social dissipation, economic dissolution, culture rupture, and revocation of the local hearth.

I join other Pacific Island scholars engaged with an ever-changing nature of Pacific identities resulting from continual population mobility, both contemporary and historical, rather than the misplaced authenticity of tradition that is too often featured in uncritical humanist and postmodernist writing. By focusing on indigeneity, I have shown that the relational and embodied knowledge of place, family, and identity are important to understanding population movement. Cultural metaphors such as *malaga* (movement), *i'inei* (local, here, home) and *fafo* (abroad, overseas) are used to explicate Samoan mobility. The village/metropolitan, core/periphery, or local/global dichotomies found in the literature tend to focus too much on inequality and economic opportunity. *I'inei* and *fafo* go beyond such polarities to emphasize relationships and social space or social connectedness, the *vā*. The substantive focus of my critique is brought about by the nature of Oceania itself. The centrality of social membership and social attachment to family, land, and place is at the core of values for island peoples and forms the basis of what Euro-Americans call self-esteem. As Hau'ofa observed, “Any unity or success that we may conceive cannot be fully realized if we take only the socioeconomic factors into consider-

ation. The realm of the mind and values, and that is culture, cannot be divorced from that of society and economy” (1993, 130). Culture matters, even as boundaries are contested and transgressed through population movement.

The persistence of cultural foundations of mobility behaviors, as in the expansion of *‘āiga* across rural communities, urban settings, and international boundaries, illustrates a process common among all Pacific Island societies. In her study of population mobility in Satowan Atoll in Chuuk, Lola Quan Bautista demonstrated that understanding movement is broadly informed by cultural ideas about home and the atoll, rather than perceived as a distinction between rural and urban or atoll and metropolitan (2001). For the people of Satowan, what is important is how those away enhance the *falang* (homesite) through reciprocity, remittance, and continued interaction. Given the enduring population movement going on in many countries in the region, people’s interactions with place have confounded conventional wisdom on migration, remittance, and development. They collapse the wrongheaded categories and paradigms that have been emphasized in academic studies on Oceania since the 1960s.

The link between *malaga* and *vā* points to the importance of thinking about migration more socially than territorially. *Vā* transcends the spatial boundaries and dichotomies inherent in the categories of migration and transnationality. In her study of Satowan Atoll, Quan Bautista wrote, “Social space may include mobility, and stresses the significance of subjective or cognitive ‘space’ as a way of knowing and evaluating the physical environment and behavior. . . . People’s corresponding mobility is described as embodiments, journeys, and travels, an imagery of relationships between people and social space” (2001, 164). *Vā* similarly allows us to conceive of movement in terms of links, pathways, juxtapositions of locations, and the networks that people reestablish as they move.

Distance does not separate *‘āiga*, but only provides further interconnecting social pathways. Nor does greater distance translate into diminishing commitment to families, because social connections constitute a significant part of people’s identity and self-esteem. It is therefore the *vā*, social connections, rather than geographic boundaries that are central to Samoan conceptions of movement. *Vā*, like *malaga*, is a concept larger than “migration,” which implies a narrow perception of movement and human relationships limited to concerns for survival and material consumption. Redirecting our attention to understanding Samoan mobility through kin connections carries us beyond the geographic boundaries of

nation-states or the dichotomies of origin/destination, rural/urban, core/periphery, and local/global.

\* \* \*

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## Notes

1 By introducing the assembly line in 1913, Henry Ford revolutionized the production of cars. The technological paradigm of Fordism became especially prevalent from the 1940s to the 1970s in the standardization of production, marking an epoch in American economic power and accelerated consumerism.

2 In other parts of the Pacific, land is also linked to social identity. See Ravuvu



1983 on *vanua* in Fiji, Ka‘ili 2005 on *fonua* in Tonga, Teparii 1994 on *fenua* in Tahiti, Murton 1987 on *whenua* in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and Bonnemaïson 1994 and Rodman 1987 on the Vanuatu connection to land as source of identity. *Fanua* is interchangeably used with ‘*ele‘ele*, which means dirt or soil but also means blood, so that *fanua ma ‘ele‘ele* denotes connection between blood/sweat and land because family members have toiled, cultivated, and cared for these lands through the generations. Thus, strong proprietary sentiments and ancestral identification with *fanua* are tremendous.

3 Hawaiians have a similar concept, *mālama ‘āina*, meaning take care of the land and the land will feed you (Kame‘eleihiwa 1992).

4 As Wendt noted (1999), the concept of social space traverses many Pacific languages. For recent discussions on the importance of *vā* in understanding Pacific Islanders interactions in overseas contexts, see Ka‘ili 2005 on *tauhi vā* (nurturing of sociospatial ties) in Tongan society. Ka‘ili’s recently completed dissertation examines *tauhi vā* as a performing art that transforms time and space to create beauty as well as evaluating the form and aesthetic of *tauhi vā* in Tongan society (2007). See also Mila-Schaaf 2006 on use of *vā* in social work. Michael Poltorak described how *tauhi vaha‘a* impacts the way Tongans relate to mental illness (2007).

5 Fofō Sunia, former US congressman for American Sāmoa, has also written about the importance of these social relationships in Samoan culture (1997).

6 Anae also mentioned *vā fealoa‘i* and *vā tapuia* as important influences on the behavior of New Zealand-born Samoan youths (1998).

7 While this paper was under review for publication, Tina’s father passed away suddenly in summer 2007, and Tai, who had been diagnosed with cancer, died in November 2007.

8 Interestingly, the same epigraph was mentioned by people I interviewed in Salelologa during my fieldwork in 1999.

9 Similarly, Connell (1983a, 1983b, 1990) and Ward (1980, 1989) pessimistically viewed Pacific Island migration linked to remittances and aid as contributing to dependency. Ward prophesied that the South Pacific might one day become bereft of indigenous people, a mere playground for tourists and laboratory for academic researchers (1989).

10 Meyer further noted, “Relationship as the ‘cornerstone of Hawaiian experience which shaped knowledge’ is also a key component. . . . Relationships or interdependence offered Hawaiians opportunities to practice reciprocity, exhibit balance, develop harmony with land, and generosity with others” (2001, 134).

11 “Basic to this understanding of sharing is the giving not for self-glorification but it is done for the glory of God. It is not only a response to the human needs, but more to a response from the heart to the love of God, whether it is individual or communal” (Kamu 1996, 55).

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## *Abstract*

New flows of population movements have called into question both conventional categories of “migration” and their assumptions, encouraged by concepts such as diaspora and transnationalism. Despite the incorporation of the new concepts diaspora and transnationalism in migration studies in Oceania, conceptual prob-



lems remain because traditional categories of migration, diaspora, and transnationalism continue to dominate mobility literature with notions of severing ties, uprootedness, and rupture as Pacific Islanders move from the periphery (villages) to the core (Pacific Rim countries). In this article, I argue that indigenous conceptions of migration and development provide a better understanding of people's movements and the connection of migration to development for Island societies and economies. Through an ethnogeographic study of Salelologa, a Samoan village with members in Sāmoa and overseas, I use Samoan concepts for migration, *malaga*, and social connectedness, *vā*, to examine the processes, ideologies, and interactions that *'āiga* (kin group, family members) maintain and retain in the diaspora as they seek ways to improve households and human betterment. This discussion of a Samoan philosophy and epistemology of movement expands, invigorates, and redefines ideas of migration, development, transnationality, place, and identity through Samoan ontological lenses. Harnessing an awareness of indigenous concepts is not enough, however, unless indigeneity and its concepts are fully integrated into theoretical approaches to mobility research in Oceania.

KEYWORDS: indigeneity, epistemology, malaga, *vā*, development, ideology, Pacific Islanders