Sāmoa at large: The Sacred Circle and Travelling *fale* and *measina*[1]

Introduction to the Special Section

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In the essay 'Our sea of islands', Epeli Hau'ofa (1994:151–3) influentially argued for 'what may be called "world enlargement" carried out by tens of thousands of ordinary Pacific Islanders right across the ocean.' Hau'ofa further stressed that 'there is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as "islands in a far sea" and as "a sea of islands"'. 'The second,' he concluded, 'is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships.' This special section takes up 'things' in their material sense. Their travels have amounted to hundreds of thousands of journeys over centuries beyond Oceania and on a global scale.[2] *Fale* (Sāmoan houses) have been (re)erected in a range of exhibition formats, from the colonial *Völkerschauen* (human zoos or ethnic shows) (Balme 2008, Thode-Arora 2014) to contemporary art biennials, as well as on university campuses and in tourism resorts. Similarly, *measina* (Sāmoan material treasures) can be found in museum collections from anthropology via art to natural history, as well as in commercial centres and political institutions. This mobile artif-

1 Note on the articles of this Special Section: When using the general category of Indigenous, we use uppercase, on par with other conventional markers such as Western, and observe the use of capitals in reference to specific Indigenous people, such as Sāmoan. To avoid Othering Indigenous languages, we italicize Indigenous words and concepts only on first use. We follow the conventions of using macrons or fa'amamafa for Sāmoan words to indicate a double vowel, and of using the glottal stop or koma liliu in Sāmoan. However, in the titles of books, organizations, and in historical archival sources and texts these words have been left in their original form. Although the country remains formally New Zealand, we use the double appellation Aotearoa New Zealand where appropriate to reflect the increasing formal use of this term.

2 Following Hau'ofa (1994) and others, we use 'Oceania' instead of 'Pacific.'

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actuality has carried its own cosmological foundations with it, such as the underpinning sacred circle, genealogical inscriptions and cultural meanings, thus embodying a kind of reality that allows for the (re)activation of experiences of Sāmoanness, at home and/or abroad, for example, through architectural interventions, curatorial practices and virtual exhibiting.

This special section follows the ways in which what might be called *Sāmoa at large*, as a specific manifestation of Oceanic 'world enlargement', comes to be constituted through the mobile relations between travelling material things, narratives, such as those of memory, genealogy and (re)imagination, and human practices of meaning- and knowledge-making across multiple localities, including their virtual appearances. The sacred Sāmoan circle, which is often manifested in fale settings and enacted through measina exchanges, places consensus at the centre, a practice that remains unchanged in the face of new political situations and is continuously negotiated on different but overlapping scales with reference to family, village, district, national and transnational genealogies. Sāmoan fale and measina have been travelling to various locations for centuries, from universities in Aotearoa New Zealand to museums in Germany. What happens when they are on the move? The articles collected here present perspectives from across the spectrum of material disciplines—anthropology, architecture, and museology—with a focus on the sacred circle and travelling fale and measina, as well as the associated human world-making practices that expand and shape *Sāmoa at large*.

Contemporary Sāmoa is divided politically between American Sāmoa and independent (or Western) Sāmoa. At first sight, then, there exist two Sāmoas. Yet, both political entities have grown out of and continue to be organized through the relations between multiple islands and their genealogically inscribed districts and affiliations. Genealogically, Manono, located in 'Sāmoa', can be considered as a topographical fragment of Fiji and a member of the Sāmoan district 'Āiga i le Tai' (family by the sea). Manuʻa, situated in 'American Sāmoa', was governed by the chiefly title of Tui Manuʻa, which can be traced back to Tagaloa, the creator of the universe. In ancient times, this island group was politically independent from Savaiʻi and Upolu (in today's 'Sāmoa') (Krämer 1902, 1903; Meleiseā, and Schoeffel Meleiseā 1987; Suaalii-Sauni et al. 2018; Turner 1884; Williams 1873). Furthermore, what is now independent Sāmoa has been marked by German colonial rule (1900–14) and the subsequent administration by New Zealand (1914–62), while to this date American Sāmoa remains a so-called unincorporated and unorganised territory of the United States. In the twenty-first century, Sāmoan diasporic populations are found in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Hawaiʻi, the west coast of the United States, the United Kingdom and beyond (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009; Macpherson and Macpherson 2009). What could be considered as one—Sāmoa—has been characterized by internal and external multiplicities.[3]

3 See our related project on 'Sāmoan multiplicities' (https://www.indigen.eu/projects/core-projects/samoan-multiplicities), which gave rise to this special section, as part of the ERC research group devoted to 'Indigeneities in the 21st century' (www.indigen.eu).

This special section builds on the premise that such Sāmoan multiplicities—the ways anybody or anything could be identified as Sāmoan—and the resulting Sāmoanness, as an experience of collective identity and sense of self (Henderson 2016; Mageo 1998), can be *expanded* through the sacred circle in relation to travelling fale and measina beyond territorial definitions and confinements (such as independent Sāmoa versus American Sāmoa). The resulting *Sāmoa at large* is *spatially embedded* (for example, in landscapes, journeys and diverse localities), *materially enacted* (as through architectural and curatorial interventions, as well as material entities), and *temporally negotiated* (through memories, genealogies and other narrative frames and modalities); it unfolds across the homeland and the diaspora, being performed in the present by reaching back to the past and forward into the future. This process of (re)constitution proceeds through the dialectics between continuity and change, solidity and flexibility. In this special section, the authors are particularly concerned with the *material dimension* without, however, losing sight of the interrelated spatial and temporal dimensions by zooming in on the interplay between spatial settings, material entities and human actors. In doing so, the authors offer novel insights into why and how Sāmoanness remains a valid marker of identity underpinned by a set of core values despite ongoing transformations: being reshaped but not ruptured, and maintaining its integrity within flexible boundaries.

The anthropological and related literature provides a significant corpus of work devoted to material culture in motion (Thomas 1991; Marcus and Myers 1995; Clifford 1997; Harrison et al. 2013; Bell and Hasinoff 2015; Joyce and Gillespie 2015; Bennett et al. 2016; Basu 2017; Driver et al. 2021; Jallo 2023). 'Things' keep on being reapproached and reconceptualized (Henare et al. 2007; Bennett 2009; Miller 2010; Bogost 2012; Shaviro 2014; Atzmon and Boradkar 2017), while a particular thread has turned the emphasis from the 'social life of things' (Appadurai 1986) to the 'social life of materials' (Drazin and Küchler 2015; see also Ingold 2007, 2012). The notion of materiality pursued here refers neither exclusively to the attributes of 'something' nor to the properties of its materials as such, but instead to the forces and potentialities that underlie, constitute and mobilise material entities (Saxer and Schorch 2020; see also Schorch et al. 2020, Chapters 1 and 5). Much of the Oceanic literature on 'material things' has drawn on the multiple relationships and ongoing connections (human and other-than-human) that are bound to and activated through materiality. In the case of Sāmoan material culture, this has largely been framed in terms of ethnology since Augustin Krämer's work in the early 20th century (1902; 1903), followed by Te Rangi Híroa (Peter Buck) (1930) and, decades later, Roger Neich (1985). Sean Mallon's (2002) more recent anthropological focus on Sāmoan measina has extended the lens on materially grounded and enacted human and other-than-human connectivity into the 21st century.

More specifically, the literature offers illuminating cases that shed light on the significance of mats, especially *'ie toga* (fine mats), in Sāmoan affairs from the ancient past to the (post)modern present (Schoeffel 1999; Tcherkézoff 2002), as specific material

things that gain their potency through practices of exchange and trajectories of circulation. Those travelling measina posed a seemingly untameable problem to the German colonial administration of 'German Samoa' (1900-1914), which struggled to distinguish, on the one hand, between ʻie toga or *ʻie o le* mālō—fine or heirloom mats—and *lagaga* (common mats), and on the other, between the monetary values assigned to them. As a result, the colonial government set up an office staffed by Germans and Sāmoans to determine the precise value of each mat and mark it with a stamp. This intervention aimed at turning ambiguous Sāmoan customs into manageable procedures defined according to the value system of capitalist commerce and trade, a process that prevented Sāmoans from mixing monetary and sacred systems of value in ways that were incomprehensible to Germans (see Schorch et al. 2020: chapter 6). Such mats have continued to be exchanged, but they have also been made malleable to newly evolving value regimes.

On December 20, 2022, the new 'Samoa Arts and Culture Centre' was opened in a high-profile ceremony involving Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mataʻafa, the prime minister of Sāmoa, and H.E Chao Xiaoliang, the ambassador of the People's Republic of China, which financed the large complex. Right at the front entrance, impossible to miss, any visitor encounters a large display of a "Ie Samoa', a masterpiece woven by Mrs Saumalama Fomaʻi from the village of Aufaga, next to a certificate verifying that the "Ie Samoa, fine mat and its cultural value' were inscribed on the 'Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage' by UNESCO on December 12, 2019. One could assume that this mat's journey, physically and conceptually, would now have found its final destination. However, Sāmoan mats do need to keep on circulating. Remarkably, in the 1970s, the evolving Joan P. Haydon Museum in Pago Pago on Tutuila (American Sāmoa) set out to develop a collection policy that would enable mats housed in the museum to do precisely that: to keep on circulating.[4] This particular policy has not been put into practice as yet, but Sāmoan measina such as mats have shown that material entities keep on travelling both physically and conceptually, provoking interactions and exchanges that are navigated through and entangled with their material presences.

Corresponding to the framework laid out in this introduction, the authors of this special section zoom in on a specific spatial setting, *alofi sā,* the sacred circle underpinning *faʻasāmoa* (the Sāmoan way) (Serge Tcherkézoff), as well as travelling material things, such as fale (Albert L. Refiti and Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul) and measina (Stephanie Walda-Mandel, Mitiana Arbon and Taʻiao Matiu Matavai Tautunu). Through the alofi sā, Tcherkézoff presents a holistic and integrative frame of reference through which the fa'asāmoa is able to withstand and incorporate influences and changes. Tcherkézoff demonstrates the political formation of a new national apparatus, initiated during the road to independence culminating in 1962, in which conflicting views have been considered through processes of peaceful dialogue nationally. Such examples continue to

4 This policy is kept in the archives in Pago Pago, American Sāmoa.

exist, as in the case of the election, in 2021, of Sāmoa's current government led by its first female Prime Minister, Hon. Fiamē Naomi Mataʻafa, to whom we alluded above. The markers of these forums are integrated into the relational space where the sacred circle, when interrogated, can expand and contract accordingly. Similarly, Refiti and Engels-Schwarzpaul introduce the Sāmoan fale as an activating emblem and a validating pillar for Sāmoan identities and experiences of Sāmoanness. The fale is both a structured and an open space; it is itself a performative agent within its contextual framings. The power of its architectural inscriptions is embedded in the conceptual references that travelling fale offer in the 21st century. The alofi sā, which underpins the circular setup of the fale, adds complex meanings of the invisible and tangible articulations of Sāmoanness, which hold and nurture the relationality between people alongside their ancestors. In their article, Walda-Mandel, Arbon and Tautunu delve into the mobile artifactuality of measina, presenting a call to action through which Pacific peoples become centred in museological partnership models. Connecting with measina and partnering with communities requires care and a project set-up that translates the decolonization of museums from the conceptual plane of discussion into the operational level of practice. This case study challenges museums to extend their realm of activities beyond consultation and move towards building new communities, here around physical and virtual measina. Taken together, and in many different ways, these articles showcase *Sāmoa at large*: connected islands across vast oceans, navigated and (re)established through the alofi sā and travelling fale and measina.

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Glossary of Terms

‘Āiga i le Tai’ (family by the sea)
alofi sā, the sacred circle
‘ie toga (fine mats)
‘ie o le mālō—fine or heirloom mats
Fa‘asamoa (the Sāmoan way)
Fale (Sāmoan houses)
Lagaga (common mats)
Measina (Sāmoan material treasures)
Völkerschauen (human zoos or ethnic shows)

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