

The Reconstruction of a Sāmoan Village: Quest for the Spatial Narration of the Mythological origin and the Social Structure of Poutasi.

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Abstract

In 2009 the traditional village centre of Poutasi was destroyed by a tsunami and a majority of the inhabitants since have abandoned the old settlement. Only a few of the former residents repaired or reconstructed their houses at the traditional site at and around the village square; most of them decided to adopt a settlement development which increasingly took into account a persistent trend: to meet the requirements of modern mobility and to live at or near the road. As a result of this shift the village has lost its traditional public space, the village square, but at the same time it has not found a similar place at the road. Although most central institutions of the village and the district today are located at the main road within a small distance from each other, there is no public square where people can meet, communicate and celebrate their festivities as they were used to do at the traditional square. The loss of the traditional village centre is not only a loss of sociability, but also a loss of the social identity of the village: The traditional village square and its surrounding buildings once reflected the legendary origin and the social structure of the village as described by the Sāmoan mythology as documented in the 19th century fa'alupēga, a ceremonial salutation of greeting made on formal occasions, which refers to the historical justification of the village hierarchy of chiefs. The loss of the traditional village centre of Poutasi means the loss of an important part of the Sāmoan spatial archives.

Keywords: Sāmoa, social organisation, village, social change, disaster response, spatial organisation.

Introduction

At the end of September, 2009, a tsunami destroyed almost all villages on the south coast of the island Upolu (Sāmoa). According to eye-witnesses the village of Poutasi in the district of Falealili, situated in a central position of the coast, was one of the worst hit places. The wave extended approximately 200 m inland, overrunning all buildings as far as the main coastal road, also damaging most of the hospital and school buildings. In the old village nucleus the house of the village council, the houses of the families of the three high chiefs (*ali'i*), the church buildings of both the Congregational and the Catholic church, the residences of the two pastors and the houses of some of the high-ranking talking chiefs (*tulāfale*) and a handful houses of some kinsmen of the high chiefs either have been severely hit, completely destroyed or even been swept away to the sea. The following picture taken from a helicopter (Fig. 1) shows the village nucleus a few days before and one day after the tsunami and a picture taken only a couple of hours after the wave (Fig. 2) provide evidence of the disaster.

Figure 1: Aerial pictures of Poutasi before and after the Tsunami



(Source: MNRE)

Figure 2: Poutasi a few hours after the Tsunami



(Source: MNRE)

The present study surveys the spatial patterns in the course of the reconstruction of the village and the central themes and ideas which have served the village people as marks of orientation in the process of reconstruction. In order to achieve its aims the study proceeds along three methodical steps of research: (a) the procurement and comparison of aerial pictures showing the spatial structure of the village before and after the tsunami, (b) a detailed mapping of the current village structure and its comparison with previous mappings and (c) interviews with all heads of those families whose houses were affected by the tsunami, concerning eventual behavioural changes after such a natural phenomenon, their aims and central ideas for the reconstruction of their homes, including the question of the symbolic values of the traditional place and its implications concerning social esteem, prestige and political power.

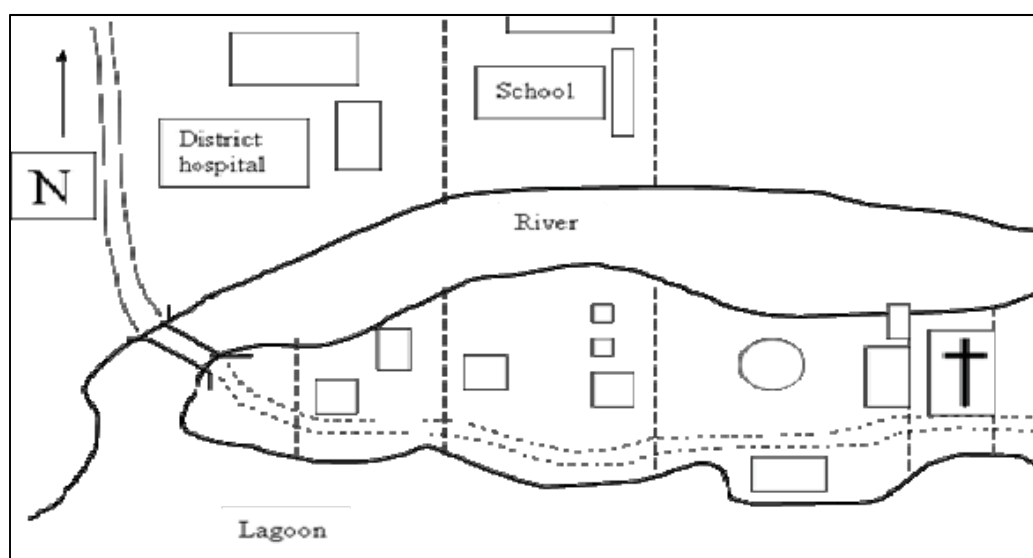
This article argues that the Poutasi as it was before the tsunami architecturally and spatially has been marked as a place of a specific social identity and a spatial mirror of the social structure. Even so the majority of the village people did not rebuild their homes on the original place at the sea but shifted inland to a place securely above the sea level at the main road in the same time means the loss of the traditional village centre. One of the leading questions of this project was to find out whether the present generations still are aware of the meaning of the spatial narration of their

village and whether they consider it to be important enough to suppress their fears concerning a recurrent tsunami and rebuild the settlement according to its tradition. It maintains that this trend is not only a loss of sociability, but also a loss of the social identity of the village: The traditional village square and its surrounding buildings once reflected the mythological origin and the social structure of the village as described by the Sāmoan mythology and documented in the fa'alupēga, the archives of the Sāmoan society. The loss of the traditional village centre of Poutasi means the loss of an important part of the Sāmoan spatial archives including sociability. It begins with some observations on the spatial structure of the village before and after the tsunami, continues with the observation of local and general trends in architecture and settlement structures in Sāmoa and then focuses on a reflection of some social consequences of this spatial development. The second chapter moves from observation to explanation presenting first an analysis of the spatial village structure as a symbol and a message of social prestige and identity, then opening up for a discussion on spatial structures and "ideal public spheres" in the sense of Habermas before theoretically reflecting on the observed spatial trends in terms of privacy, publicity and social identity.

Poutasi after the Tsunami – Depopulation of the Village Nucleus

A map drawn of the village centre during the field work conducted in 2006 shows the spatial structure of Poutasi as it has developed in the course of the last centuries (Fig. 3). Located on the sandy bank of a peninsula (respectively an island) between the lagoon on the south side and a river/swamp on the north side, the village presented a line of settlements, i.e. a series of houses for the various families stretched along the lagoon in the neighbourhood of the buildings of the main institutions of the village: the house of the village council (fono matai) at the village square (malae) and the buildings of the two churches, congregational and catholic, all in all eleven buildings. The village primary school and the district college are located north of the village square and on the other side of the river, i.e. beyond the traditional village nucleus, while the district hospital is located west of the school.

Figure 3: Village nucleus of Poutasi: Stock of buildings (2006)

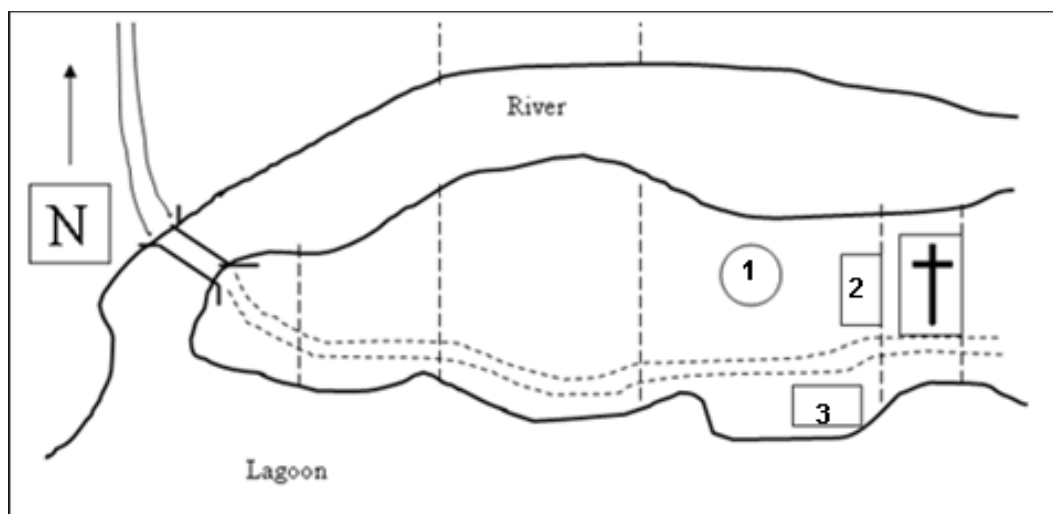


(Source: own draft according to mapping in 2006)

In July 2015, six years after the tsunami, the village centre presented a totally different picture (Fig. 4). Of the once 10 buildings on both sides of the malae or village square only four houses in this part of the village have been repaired or reconstructed since the tsunami: apart from the church building and the guest house of Tuatagaloa (1), which almost completely withstood the force of the

wave, is the house of the Tuatagaloa family (children of the late previous ali'i sa'o, among first ranking chiefs of the district) (2), and the house of the present holder of this high chief title (3); every one of these four buildings was and now is of brick or concrete. All the other houses or their remains have been levelled off. The places have been abandoned by their owners and residents, although the buildings (though damaged) as a whole were strong enough to resist the tsunami, i.e. the stone-walls of the community hall of the Congregational Church.

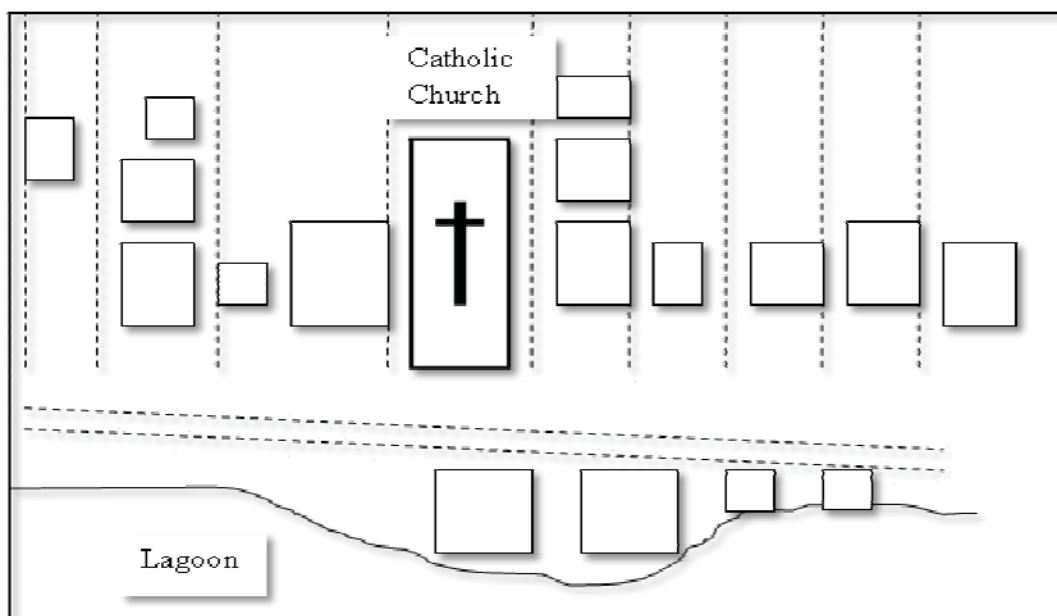
Figure 4: Village nucleus of Poutasi: Stock of buildings (2015)



(Source: own draft according to mapping in 2015)

Further on to the east end of the coastal part of the village and beyond the Congregational Church once there stood all in all thirteen buildings, the Catholic Church and the catholic community hall and to both sides of the church and the small square in front of it the houses of another eleven families (Fig. 5).

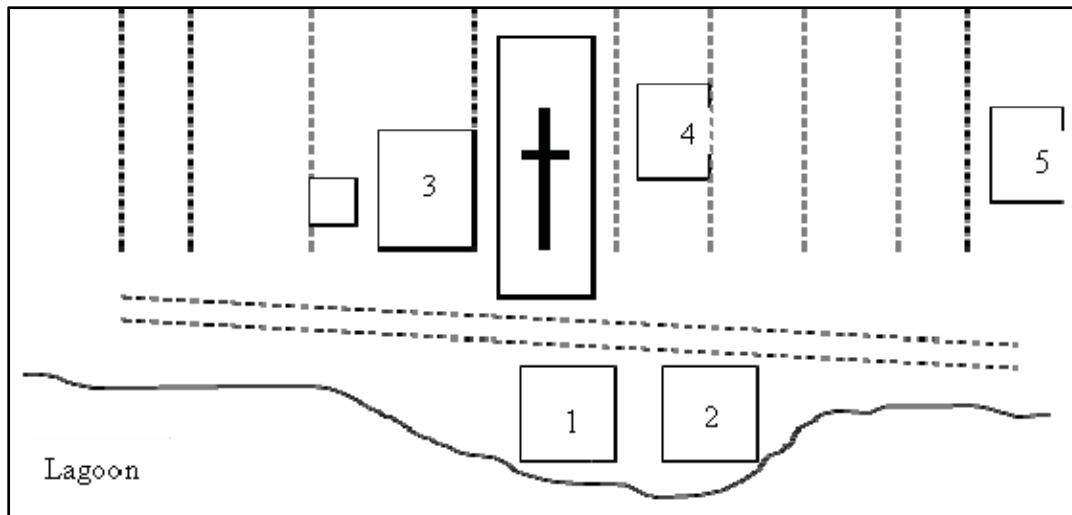
Figure 5: East end of the coastal part of Poutasi (2006)



(Source: author draft according to mapping in 2006)

Today only seven of them have been repaired or reconstructed, very similar to what happened in the central part of the village. Apart from the Catholic Church building, the Catholic community hall and the house of the Catholic minister (all buildings in stone and concrete) we find today only two residential houses (3 and 5), one of which has been repaired but not occupied, and another one (4) on its way to reconstruction (Fig. 6).

Figure 6: East end of the coastal part of Poutasi: Stock of buildings (2015)



(Source: Author draft according to mapping in 2015)

Reasons for Leaving the Place

All of the fifteen families which once lived in their houses at the lagoon before the tsunami have been interviewed concerning losses, decisions, process and reasons for decisions, eventual behavioural changes after the tsunami, previous and present locations and costs of reconstruction, financing and aspects of prestige (*mamalu*) and power (*pule*). Included are interviews with the three present holders of the high chief titles and the daughter of the late first ranking chief of the village and the district who occupies the representative house of the Tuatagaloa family at the village square between the village council and the congregational church.

The shock they all experienced during this natural disaster was deep and is long lasting. Six persons lost their lives, many others were injured, some of them so severely that they had to stay in hospital for weeks and even months. While a few of the residents were not on the spot when the wave occurred, most were present, some of whom succeeded in escaping in time by running up the 200 m to the main coastal road which is a few meters above sea level and proved to be safe; many others didn't make it in time and were overrun by the wave. The survivors succeeded in holding on to a tree or a strong branch until the water had drawn back. The experience of the tsunami led the majority of the village people to a noticeable behavioural change: to abandon the traditional site of residence at the lagoon and to move to a safer place located on a ground higher up and further up inland.

Twelve buildings were totally destroyed, three others partly damaged. All furniture, kitchen equipment and clothing were swept away and lost for ever. The value annihilated hardly can be estimated in monetary terms but the costs for only reconstructing homes and buildings amount to a sum of about WS \$1 800 000 (€ 630 000), a substantial sum for a village economy which largely still is based on semi-subsistence livelihoods. In 2006 the monetisation factor (defined as the share constituted by monetary income in relation to the total income of a village community from both

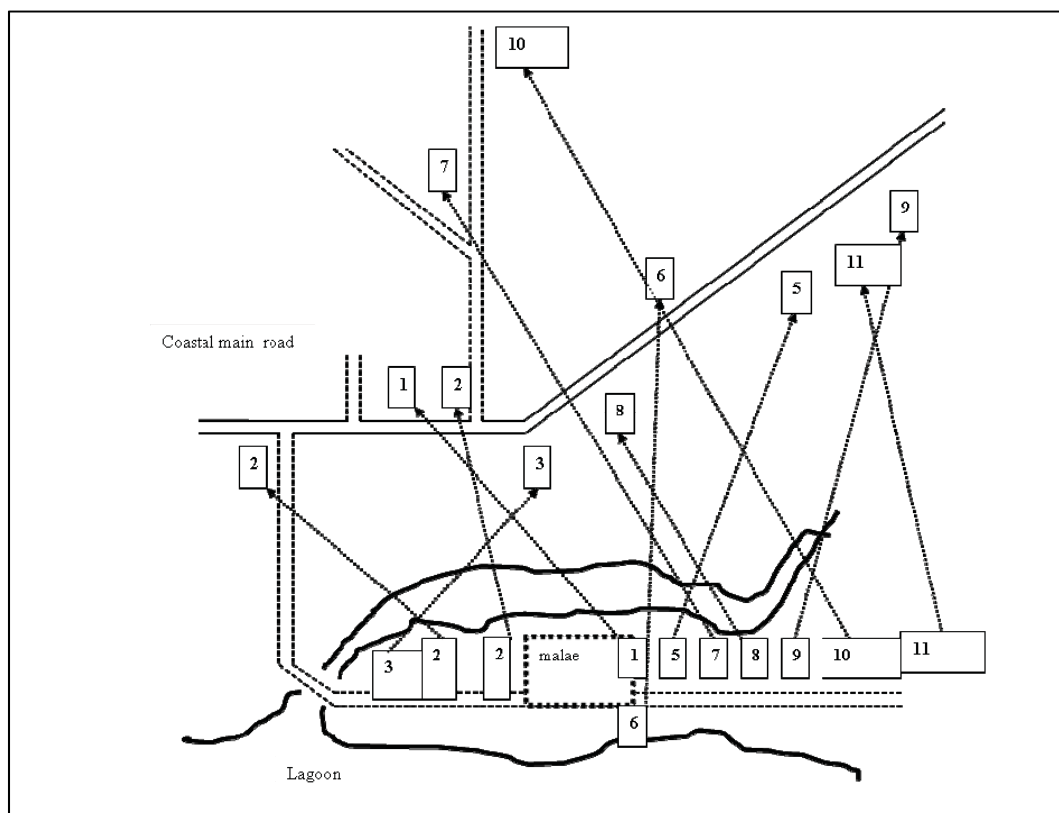
subsistence and the market sectors) of the village came to less than 50 percent of that amount, while the per capita monetary income per year in 2006 was amounted to roughly WS \$1 550, equivalent to €550 (Hennings 2011: 106). The financial aspects of the village reconstruction also reveal that solidarity systems and social networks are as intact as they were 10 years ago (Hennings 2011: 111f):

- all families were helped by the government with a sum sufficient to meet the basic requirements of a house to live in,
- 80 percent of the families received assistance by their nuclear or extended family, both in financial form and in labour/ material,
- 40 percent of the families received substantial financial, material and working aid by church relief organizations like the catholic Caritas and;
- in the cases of the two church ministers the congregational and the catholic community contributed almost for the total of the reconstruction costs.

The new Spatial Structure of the Village – A Trend to the Road

After having found provisional and temporary accommodation and board in the houses of other members of their extended families for some weeks or months, in the end the heads of the families had to decide how and where to re-establish the home. In most cases the decision was taken commonly by a family council, in some cases by the head of the family on his own. The majority of the families and their heads in the end decided for security. In only six cases the decision was to repair or to reconstruct the buildings on the traditional ground, in eleven cases the decision was for a new location. Three families decided to do both, to rebuild on the old place and to build a new house (new houses) somewhere else, and one family decided to leave the village. The result of these decisions can be viewed in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Shift of houses from the coast line to the road after the tsunami



(Source: Author draft according to interviews and mapping 2015)

Considering the dangers of another possible tsunami the twelve families once living on the sea side of the village now occupy a home in a more secure place, i.e. on a ground further up inland and situated clearly above sea level, in that part of the village which was not affected by the wave, ten of them along the main coastal road, the other two even further inland along the access road to the plantations. The decision to settle at the main coastal road is not new, but rather the confirmation of a long existing trend. In the course of the last 50 years the settlement patterns of the village have been totally reversed: Whereas in 1965 only 25 percent of the village settlements were located at the main road and the large majority of 75 percent was situated at the seaside, in 2015 we find 85 percent of the village settlements at the road and only a small minority of 15 percent still remaining at the sea (Table 1).

Table 1: Development of the settlement patterns in Poutasi

Year	Sea side	Main Road
1965	25	8
1989	25	21
2006	21	28
2015	7	38

(Sources: Lockwood 1971: 125 and author data)

The development of the village settlements towards the main road clearly reflects the socio-economic development of the Sāmoan society as a whole and particularly the Poutasi development in the course of the last 50 years. It is a development from a more or less subsistence-based economy with small scale commodity production on its way to a market economy. Whereas in Poutasi between 1989 and 2006 the monetary income per capita increased by 28 percent, in the same period the respective per capita income from subsistence product declined by eight percent. The monetisation factor (defined as the share constituted by monetary income in relation to the total income of a village community from both the subsistence and the market sectors) increased in this period of time from 63,6 to 70,9 (Hennings 2011: 106).

There is no statistical data for the development of the last ten years, but there is visible evidence, based on architecture, equipment of the households with modern furniture and kitchen appliances and the development of motorization, that the monetisation of the society as a whole and of the village society has continued. More and more village people are engaged in market economy, many have a paid labour job, either in the village but even more in other parts of the island, especially in the urban area of Apia. Busses run more frequently and the number of cars owned by village people has increased considerably. Whereas in 1982 during my first field trip I observed only two private cars in Poutasi, in 2015 I registered 32 of them (not all in a roadworthy condition) and in addition two taxis. Thirty two cars for 56 households means that almost 60 percent of the village households are provided with a car. The taxis of the village are quite busy, both in the village and beyond it in the coastal districts of the southern part of the island.

The trend to settle at the main road goes along with another trend of modernity (Tab. 2). 50 years ago 90 percent of the houses of Poutasi clearly were constructed according to traditional Sāmoan architecture (circle or oval ground plan and open, i.e. without walls to divide inside and outside and using home materials grown in the plantations) and only 10 percent of the houses had a so-called European shape, i.e. rectangular or quadratic, in most cases constructed with materials imported from overseas. In 2015 this relation proved to be the other way round: 88 percent of the houses had a "European" (rectangular or quadratic) ground plan and only 12 percent still favoured the traditional Sāmoan shape. Whereas in 1965 only five percent of the houses in Poutasi were closed, i.e. with walls to separate inside from outside, the closed type of houses in 2015 already

represented the majority, i.e. 51 percent. The development of the village architecture thus reflects a clear trend to modernity and privacy.

Table 2: Architecture and choice of construction materials in Poutasi

Year	1965	1989	2006	2015
Big Sāmoan house	20	1	-	-
Sāmoan house	43	50	34	11
Open European house (wood)	2	35	34	38
Open European house (stone)			10	2
Closed European house (wood)	4	16	10	13
Closed European house (stone)			22	33

(Source: Lockwood 1971: 125 and author data)

Village Settlements at the Road – A General Trend in Sāmoa

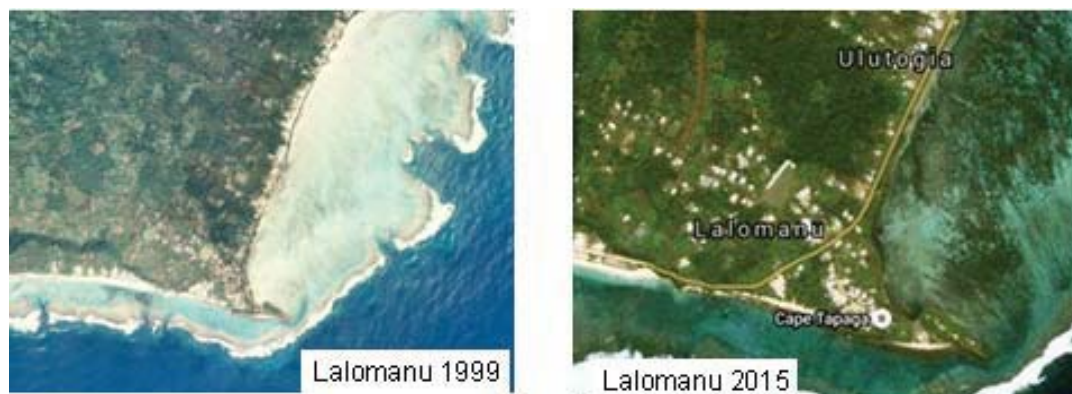
The following section does not intend to follow up the settlement development of the observed villages in detail as in the case of Poutasi but rather is meant as a means of comparison in order to describe the general settlement patterns prevailing in Sāmoa today. Like Poutasi many other villages of Upolu were struck and severely damaged by the tsunami. In most cases the fear of a repetition of such a misfortune led a majority of people to look for a safer place to rebuild their home. Such safer places in general exist further inland on grounds clearly above sea level. In the south-eastern part of the island entirely new settlement patterns have been developed: Above the old villages and on top of the cliff new settlements have emerged from the forest and the plantations and roads were built in order to connect these settlements with the existing infrastructure. Good examples for this type of resettlement after the tsunami are the villages Lepa (Fig. 8) and Lalomanu (Fig. 9). Before the tsunami both villages were located at the foot of the cliff and the uplands remained uninhabited, whereas in 2015 many plots at the shore once inhabited now remain abandoned and instead many other houses have emerged in the uplands.

Figure 8: Settlement patterns in the village of Lepa before and after the Tsunami



(Source: MNRE and google earth)

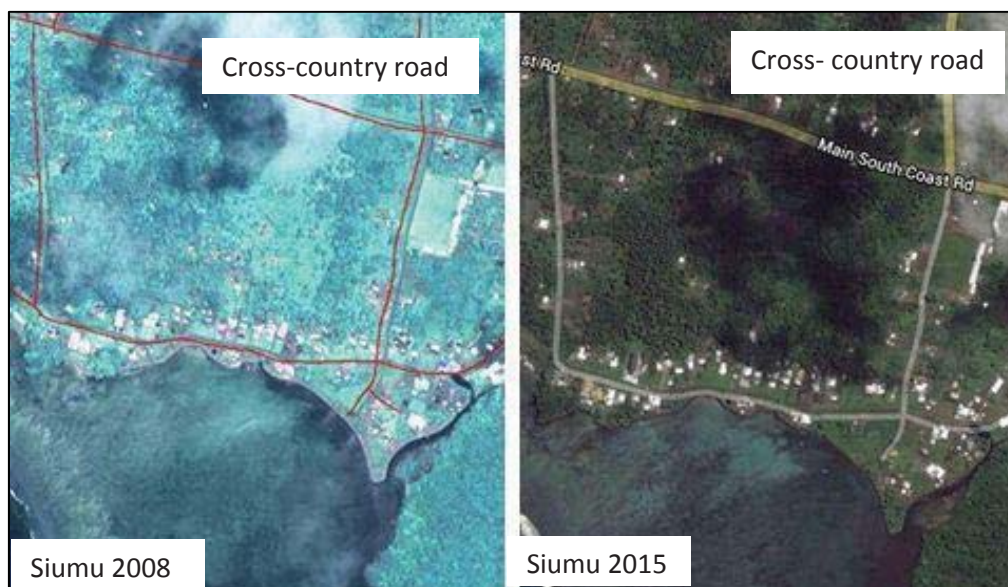
Figure 9: Lalomanu before and after the Tsunami



(Source: MNRE and google earth)

Siumu village is situated in the middle part of the south coast. This is the appropriate location to connect the south coast of Upolu with the capital Apia at the north coast, and the cross-country road was built in the 1960s. As a result of this Siumu which so far had its settlements exclusively at the sea from now on developed settlements at the main coastal road and its junction with the road across the mountain ridge to Apia. In the case of Siumu the destructions of the tsunami did not have similar effects as in the villages at the southeast end of the island. In the main Siumu has not spread more inland and beyond the range of settlements than it was before the disaster, maybe also because the seaside village is situated some meters above sea level so that the inhabitants didn't feel as threatened as their compatriots elsewhere (Fig. 10).

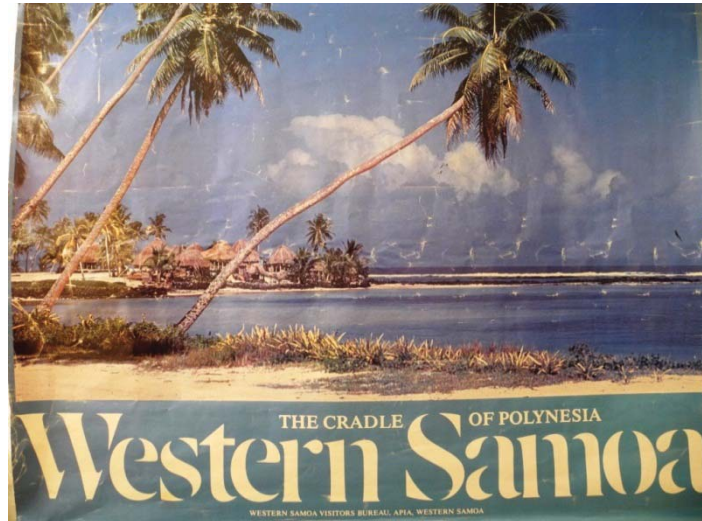
Figure 10: Siumu before and after the Tsunami



(Source: MNRE and google earth)

A very special example is the village of Salamumu in the western part of the south coast. In contrast to most other Sāmoan villages Salamumu is a relatively new settlement, founded at the beginning of the twentieth century after the volcanic eruptions on the great island of Sāmoa, Savaii. The lava covered entire villages and the people who founded Salamumu at the south coast of Upolu were given new land to set up their new homes. They did very well and built a village which for a long time could be regarded as a masterpiece of traditional Sāmoan architecture and which proudly was presented to foreign visitors and tourists (Fig. 11).

Figure 11: Salamumu 1982, Advertising poster of the Sāmoan Visitors Bureau



Almost exactly 100 years after the volcanic destruction of their old village in Savaii the new one again was eradicated, this time by the sea. By 2015, six years after the tsunami, the village has not been rebuilt; people have moved further inland where Salamumu uta (Salamumu inland) had been long since developed—as in many other cases a settlement at the coastal road.

50 years ago, and long before that, practically all Sāmoan villages were situated at the sea, although there is extensive archaeological evidence of inland settlement in earlier pre-contact times (Martinsson-Wallin 2015). The desire for increasing mobility led to the construction of roads and the establishment of bus routes, which were subsequently expanded more and more, so that in the end individual traffic tempted people to shift their homes from the traditional location at the sea further inland to the main road which connects the villages with the urban area of Apia and with other villages.

Social Consequences – A Village without Nucleus and Centre

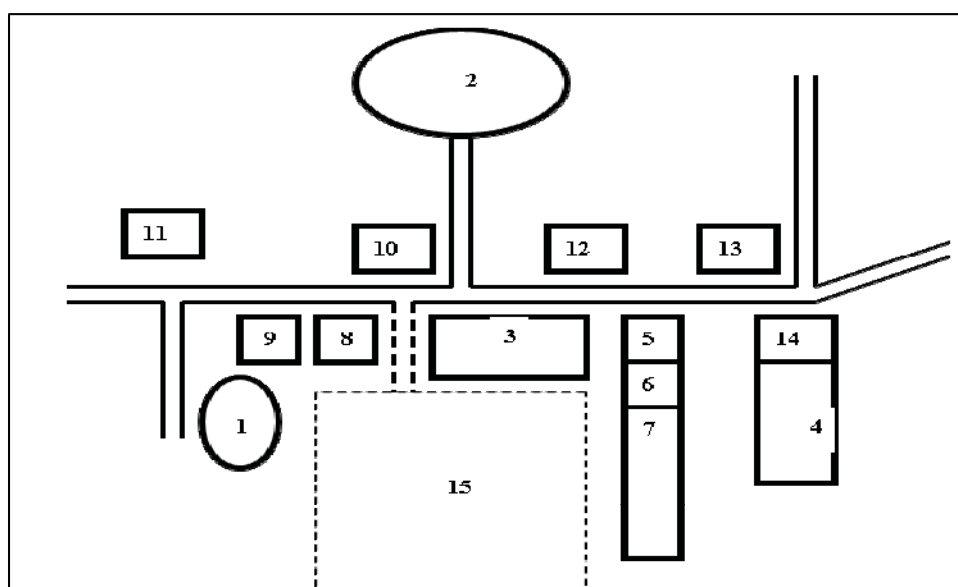
Before the tsunami the village square (*malae*) of Poutasi in front of the village council (*fono matai*) and between the residential houses of the three high chiefs of the village undoubtedly constituted the centre of the village, all the more so since other social institutions were located next to it: the Congregational and the Catholic Churches and their community halls as well as the residences of the two ministers. Except for the village council, the two church buildings, the catholic community hall and two chiefs' residences (which are not permanently occupied because their owners predominantly work and live in other places) the traditional village centre now is uninhabited. The visitor who walks along the access road to old village nucleus today is witness of an empty and in a way dead place, populated and alive only on the occasion of a chief assembly (usually once a week for half a day) and on the occasion of church services (usually twice a week Sunday morning and afternoon).

On the other hand at the coastal main road and especially in its central part between the access road to the former village nucleus and the access road to the plantations certainly we can observe a greater presence and frequency of people in the public space, but there is no evidence of a new village centre despite the fact that many if not most main institutions today are located on this section of the road (cf.: Fig. 12): the new building of the district hospital (1) and the new village community hall (3) with the sports ground between them, the new district college (2), the buildings of the newly established "Poutasi Development Trust" (PDT) with a village pre-school, a new library, a new Art Centre (5, 6 and 7), an organic farm and the administrative building of the PDT with the

office its founder, sponsor and director who also holds the Tuatagaloa title, a high chief of the village and the district (8 and 9). Complementing this accumulation of institutions and buildings we find other important buildings of public interest: the district police station (10), the main village store (11), the new community hall of the Congregational Church and the house of its minister (4 and 14) and opposite of it the new residences of Meleisea Saivaega, the second high chief of the village and the district and next to this place the new residence of the daughter of the late high chief Tuatagaloa Teo Fetu (12 and 13).

The new buildings on this section of the main coastal road certainly form a cluster in the sense of centrality, but this is not sufficient to form a new settlement centre or nucleus comparable to the traditional one at the lagoon. The new cluster of institutions and buildings at the road lacks one important condition to be a real centre: The buildings are lined up along a busy road, there is no possibility for the people to take a rest without being disturbed by the traffic, to meet and interact as they could do at the *malae*, the old place in front of the village council, because the constantly flowing supralocal traffic forces them to move on more or less steadily. To form a real centre the village lacks in particular a public place in the sense of a square which clearly is defined by buildings which skirt the place and thus give it an aura of seclusion and unity. The sports field (15) between the district hospital and the new art centre is not a square in this sense.

Figure 12: Poutasi 2015 – location of central institutions



(Source: Author draft according to mapping 2015)

From Observation to Explanation

Based on the theories of Löw and Eco the present study assumes that spaces and places can be understood as texts written or created by individuals, social groups and societies in their historical contexts and as such also can be read or visually perceived. To put the thesis in concrete terms the Poutasi as it was before the tsunami architecturally and spatially has been marked as a place of a specific social identity and a spatial mirror of the social structure. Executing certain “spacings” on and around of the public square the leading clans of the village and district have formulated very distinct messages which in their symbolic effects contribute to, legitimise and stabilize their prestige, social power and supremacy. The focus of the spatial interest and creativity of the social elite aims to present the place as a stage of power which by means of symbolic effects and an atmosphere of amazement and fascination helps to establish a specific social identity and thereby to reproduce and

stabilize the existing and prevailing social relations of power and supremacy (cf.: van der Ryn 2012 and Hennings et al. 2016).

Poutasi - Ethnographical Research and Analysis of the Spatial Structure

Krämer in his ethnography of the Sāmoan islands mentions Poutasi in the context of a the village of Saga, which in the 19th century comprised seven village sections (*pitonu'u*) The were Ilili, Saleilua, Poutasi Sameanai, Vaovai (with two *pitonu'u*) and Matautu, known as the seven houses (*fale fitu*) (Krämer 1902: 287). In the 20th century Matautu, Vaovai, Poutasi, Saleilua and Ilili became separate villages. The *malae* of Saga was and still is in Poutasi.

In this context most interesting however seems to be the text of the original *fa'alupēga*, originally an orally handed down (and since Krämer a written) compilation of the family trees of all Sāmoan high chief titles and their mythological genesis accompanied by those ceremonial phrases of welcome, which even today are recited at the beginning of every assembly of the village council by one of the untitled men when serving the kava (*'ava*) bowl to the various chiefs. The respective text of the *fa'alupēga* says for Saga:

<i>Tulouga alala gafa</i>	Greetings to the present ancestor
<i>tulouga alo o Fanene</i>	greetings to the sons of Fanene,
<i>susu mai lau susuga</i>	Greetings your honour
<i>o le matua 'o Fanene</i>	our elder Fanene
<i>afio mai lau afioga a</i>	Greetings your honour
<i>Tuatagaloa</i>	Tuatagaloa,
<i>'o le to'o savili</i>	who steers the boat against the wind
<i>'o le sa'o fetala 'i</i>	and is the leading speaker.
<i>afio mai lau afioga a</i>	Greetings your honour
<i>Meleisea</i>	Meleisea
<i>'o le sa'otamaita'i</i>	leader of the honoured group.
<i>tulouga a lau afioga a Leilua</i>	Greetings your honour- Leilua
<i>ma au tamatane Touli</i>	and your sons Touli
<i>ma Asuao ma Tapu</i>	and Asuao and Tapu
<i>ma Leali'ie'e</i>	and Leali'ie'e
<i>tulouga a oe Lufilufi</i>	Greetings to you Lufilufi
<i>ma lou ali'i</i>	and your chief
<i>'o le Tuisāmoa</i>	Tuisāmoa

(Source: Krämer 1902: 290f)

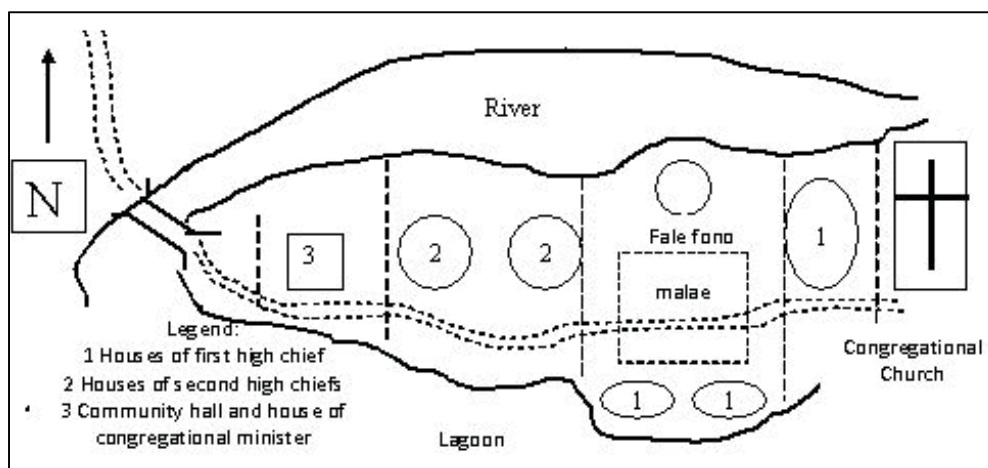
Reading the *fa'alupēga* we thus learn that Poutasi not only is part of Saga but also one of the two highest ranking villages of Falealili district (*itūmālo*) because they are the seats of two of the four highest ranking *ali'i* titles in Falealili. Tuatagaloa and Meleisea, according to mythology both of divine descent. The other two are Fuimaono and Leasiolagi of Salani village, and among the talking chiefs, Tofua'iofuia of Salani village and Talo-ole-Ma'agao of Satalo are the highest ranking.

According to the testimony of the elders of the village and especially of the orators in the mythology the highest Sāmoan god Tagaloalagi married a young lady called Muliovailele. Their son Pili, having misbehaved, was dropped down from heaven by his parents. He fell onto the Manu'a islands in the eastern part of the Sāmoan islands where he settled down, got married to a daughter of the Tuimanu'a, king of this group of the Sāmoan islands and thereby himself taking over the kingly

title. Later he married a daughter of the Tuia'ana, king of the kingdom of A'ana on the island of Upolu. His second wife gave birth to four sons, one of which was Tolufale, ancestor of Fanene who as we already know by the recited passage of the *fa'alupēga* is the father of Tuatagaloa and Meleisea, the two highest ranking chiefs of Poutasi and among the four highest in Falealili.

The *fa'alupēga* thus reflects the social order of the village and this social order is reflected by the spatial structure of the village nucleus according to a map drawn in 1965 (Fig. 13). Looking at the figure depicting the old village centre we must take into mind that the village square (*malae*) cannot be understood as a public space as it is normal for most public squares in Europe or the United States but that the ground is land under the authority (*pule*) of the two high chiefs: The *malae* thus has two sides—Fagamalama is the side of Tuatagaloa and their *māōta* (east side) and Poutasi is the side of Meleisea and their *māōta* (west side).

Figure 13: Poutasi – Spatial structure as by 1965



(Source: Author draft on the basis of Lockwood 1971: 125)

The traditional centre of the village is situated on the sandy bank of a peninsula well protected against possible enemies by a river and a swamp which separate the site from the mainland. At first glance the settlement which stretches from west to east in a row of houses seems unspectacular, but a closer look accompanied by some information concerning functions and occupants of the houses shows a well designed and realized village.

The inner nucleus is formed by the village square (*malae*), the central public place of the village, site of all important public events of the village. Here is the place to celebrate local festivities like the presentation of traditional dancing and singing, to ceremonially celebrate the weddings of the daughters of the high chiefs, to play the most popular Sāmoan version of cricket (*kilikiti*) and to receive and welcome high ranking foreign visitors. In these cases the square is the place for public celebrations of welcome with speeches of the talking chiefs and the exchange of gifts such as fine mats (*ietoga*) and roasted pigs.

The north end of the square is the location of the village council (*fale fono*) where the chiefs of the village, i.e. the elected heads of the families (*matai*), come together to hold their meetings. South of the square and located on a small piece of reclaimed area (land which artificially has been reclaimed from the sea by throwing huge lava rocks into the lagoon) is the site of two smaller Sāmoan houses meant as guesthouses of Tuatagaloa.

Lining up like a chain, a row of houses extends to both sides of the square: East of the square lies the house of the Tuatagaloa family, and west of the square lie the houses of the Meleisea family. Beyond the house of the Tuatagaloa family, i.e. east of it, is the location of the Congregational Church. West of the houses of the Meleisea family is the place of the community hall of the

Congregational Church and the residence of the congregational minister. Again to both sides of these building described above are the houses of the orators (*tulāfale*) and the kinsmen (*usoali'i*) of the high chiefs, all in all a settlement which has been designed in a very symmetrical order, at the same time reflecting the social structure and hierarchy of the village. The message of this spatial narration tells of the social significance and the prestige of the families and their titles, a message about the social consensus concerning social rank and balance.

The Traditional Village Square of Poutasi – Model of an “Ideal Public Sphere”?

Habermas bases his model of an “ideal public sphere” on three conditions:

- free access to the place for every member of the community (openness)
- free exchange of arguments (discursivity) so that in the end
- the best argument may legitimize the acceptance and execution of a decision (legitimization).

It may well be that Habermas’ definition of the public sphere is not very well suited to meet the requirements of a public square in Sāmoa because when he outlined his model of an ideal public sphere he thought of the conditions in a Vienna coffee-house, at that time ideal conditions for developing a free public opinion in a bourgeois society; and this background might not be suitable for the Sāmoan circumstances.

Therefore it may be more appropriate to include another concept of the public sphere initially formulated by Simmel already in 1908. In his idea of the public Simmel focuses on the model of communities open for a limited number of persons opposed to those communities open for everybody. A lodge, for example, is not to be regarded as private but as part of a group, i.e. another kind of public sphere, clearly distinct and separated from the rest of the public. Simmel emphasizes that the membership in a public sphere in the sense of a lodge implies two effects of one condition because the participation in and the attendance at the lodge on the one hand mean inclusion, but on the other hand exclusion for all others. Simmel’s model of a public sphere based on the idea of a secret society may be suitable to describe and explain the public of a small and limited Sāmoan community and thus may be appropriate to demarcate and separate the public sphere and the public space of this village community from the surrounding and rival villages.

In fact the village square of Poutasi suits both theoretical approaches to the public sphere and a public space. Although the square usually is not the place for social or political discussions or debates, Habermas’ model all the same meets the three conditions of his concept. Everybody is entitled to (1) enter the square, (2) listen to the exchange of arguments brought forward by the heads of the families (i.e. his own one’s too) so that in the end the decisions taken by the members of the council, i.e. the heads of the families, are publicly accepted and legitimized.

On the other hand the village square appears appropriate for Simmel’s concept of a public sphere restricted to a kind of a club such as a lodge. Being limited in the number of its members and focussed on specific local topics it allows the inclusion of all members of this community and at the same time the exclusion of all the other surrounding and competing village communities.

The Relocation to the Road is a move to Privacy and the loss of Public Space

As already indicated, the resettlement of the major part of the houses at the main coastal road ended in the loss of a real village centre, a square like the one at the lagoon in front of the village council. Today a cluster of central institutions of the district and the village certainly exists (cf. Fig. 12), but this neither meets the concepts of the public sphere brought forward by Habermas and

Simmel nor does it fit the definition of a public space and square in the sense that it may be—spatially and structurally speaking—a possible frame for human action.

A well-known definition of a square is based on three distinct factors: on the relation between the forms of the surrounding buildings; on their uniformity or their variety and on their absolute dimensions and their relative proportions in relation to width and length of the open area (Zucker 1959: 3). These three factors enumerated by Zucker may be completed by a fourth one, i.e. that it would be desirable that a square is free of road traffic in order to occasionally allow people to come together, meet and communicate. The possibility of meeting is vital for every community and society. In order to activate this possibility the community needs the public space, a place to meet in reality and not only virtually or occasionally passing by while walking at the margins of the road.

The public space in the sense of a meeting place involves more than a cluster of social functions, instead it is the place of social contact, communication and social relations; it is the place of belonging to a community and the place to experience identity with the community. A community which lacks such a public space is in danger of losing social contact and identity. A community without a public space in the long run not only loses the sense for the social but also the possibility to regenerate and to reinvent itself as a community. The public space of a community without a place for meetings, contacts and communication loses its sense of being public space, it becomes bare and empty (Quarch 2016:2). With a view to the social conditions of the “ideal public sphere” the cluster of central institutions at the main road neither is consistent with the model of Habermas nor with that of Simmel; the disappearance of a public square in Poutasi at the same time means the loss of the public sphere.

The imminent danger of losing social identity by neglecting the requirements for a public space in Poutasi after the tsunami goes along with settlement patterns which increasingly tend toward residential houses built in the “European” way, i.e. outer walls separate the interior from the outside and inner walls separate individuals from others inside (cf. chapter 1.3, Table 2). The traditional Sāmoan house is open, a building on posts which carry a roof and which has no separating walls, neither to the outside nor inside. Physically this kind of architecture is most suitable in a tropical climate like in Sāmoa because it allows the regularly blowing trade winds to ventilate the house, thereby preventing the overheating of the interior. Socially the trend to closed houses means a development which emphasises privacy and protects the occupants from the curiosity of others, but it is also possible to formulate it the other way round: privacy-enhanced houses protected by walls prevent people from establishing contacts and entering into social relations. The loss of the public space and the trend to privacy can be seen as two sides of the same coin, both are steps away from Sāmoan tradition towards global modernity.

The loss of the Public Space – Price to pay for Progress?

As we have seen the move of the majority of the villagers to resettle not at the traditional place but more inland to the main coastal road is due to two effects: the fear to be a victim of another natural disaster on the one hand and to take part in the modernisation of the Sāmoan society on the other hand. Both strategies have a common basis, i.e. to avoid by this settlement scheme vulnerability, precarity, poverty and social exclusion.

“Precarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others. Unpredictable encounters transform us; we cannot control, even of ourselves. Unable to rely on a stable structure of community, we are thrown into shifting assemblages, which remake us as well as our others. We can’t rely on the status quo, everything is in flux; including our ability to survive.” (Tsing 2015:20).

The concept of precarity is closely linked with social development in post-industrial capitalist societies, especially with labour market deregulation, it also includes links with so-called natural

disasters: Flood disasters and perishing pacific islands f.e. are due to climatic change caused by the profit-mongering of a capitalistic production still based on the (over-)use of carbondioxide emitting industries. Natural disasters like a tsunami however are not related to man-made catastrophes because they are the result of geo-tectonic movements a couple of kilometres under the surface of the earth: In the course of the continental drift tectonic plates collide at so-called subductive zones and thereby cause tensions which then discharge all of a sudden and at non-predictable times: earth quakes and sea-quakes. The latter tend to provoke tsunamis, huge waves which threaten surrounding coastal areas. Although not man-made this kind of disaster nevertheless can be a cause of precarity in terms that it invokes a fear of indeterminacy: We never know when such phenomenon occur.

Indeterminacy thus can be a threat to human existence, in the modern world we try to control our life by following the paths of modernity: democracy, economic growth and science, in short by modernisation and progress. "Progress is a forward march, drawing other kinds of time into its rhythms. Without that driving beat, we might notice other temporal patterns... Progress still controls us even in tales of ruination. Yet the modern human conceit is not the only plan for making worlds: we are surrounded by many plan-making projects, human and not human" (Tsing 2015: 21).

The problem is that progress is not synonymous with general and all-round benefit, progress often means a loss, too. By choosing progress and security villagers leaving their original places at the village square in the same time may have lost their centre of public life and social identity. Realizing this dilemma it might be advisable to change perspective and paradigm: Instead of permanently looking ahead occasionally it could be wise to look around (Tsing: 22).

The spatial structures of Poutasi before and after the tsunami perfectly reflect this idea. "Looking ahead" (progress) symbolically can be imagined by streets, geometrically expressed by lines, i.e. a figure which leads from a place (a) to a place (b). "Looking around" (standstill) however symbolically can be imagined by squares, geometrically expressed by circles, ovals, triangles, quadrants or rectangles. Streets and lines stand for speed and acceleration (no time) whereas squares stand for slowing down and rest-time to pause and stay, to take notice and care of others.

The Generations of Today – Still aware of the Sense of the Place?

To the foreign visitor Poutasi does not reveal its atmospheric qualities and symbolic effects at first glance, but only after a closer look at the local mythology and social structure. Most certainly the message of the spacing underlying the spatial order of the village nucleus has been common mental property to all village people, but the leading question of this project was to find out whether the present generations still are aware of the meaning of the spatial narration of their village and whether they consider it to be important enough to suppress their fears concerning a recurrent tsunami and rebuild the settlement according to its tradition.

The decisions taken by the families and their heads provide a first indication that the majority (12) of them no longer is aware of the social qualities of the place because most of them resettled somewhere else. Four of the seven families rebuilding their house at the old place nevertheless have in addition a new house at the road where they predominantly live. Of the remaining three families who now own only the residence at the seaside there are two without any other choice because they have no other ground to build their house on; in case of urgent need, the last family may have the alternative to move to the new house of a sister next to the plantations.

At the time the interviews were taken (2015) only three families proved to have a clearly defined "sense of the place" (Feld/ Basso 1996), saying that for them it had been out of the question to rebuild the house at the old place. They are aware of the magic of the place and for them it is a question of prestige and tradition to show presence at the village square, the village council and in

the immediate neighbourhood of their churches. Two family sites stem from the Tuatagaloa clan, one is the current holder of this title and the other one is the daughter of the late previous title holder. The third family is part of the Tumanuvao title, the holder of which is one of the most important orators in the village council. The traditional site for the Tumanuvao family is the place immediately next to the Catholic Church and east of it (Fig. 4 and 13, houses 1 and Fig 6, house 4).

Some of the family heads remained pensive when at the end of the interview they were confronted with the narrative aspects of the traditional village centre, the magic of the place and the role their old place of residence might play in terms of prestige, social influence and power in village politics. At this point of the discussion the two heads of the Meleisea clan declared they were quite aware of the symbolic and social value of the site and were open to re-considering the question and trying to find a solution in the context of considerable financial aid by the extended family. Only one year after the interviews the new holder of the Meleisea title has made plans to build a new *fale tālimālō* on the *māōta* Poutasi, an important step forward to restore the traditional village nucleus and spatial identity of the village.

The majority of the villagers however show little concern about symbolic effects and atmospheric qualities but are interested primarily in safety and second in land tenure, i.e. to ensure that the property rights in the place where once the residence of the family was do not get lost if the ground no longer is guaranteed by using it. In most cases the family heads have a solution in mind which both saves their financial resources and gives a possibility to other members of the extended family who dispose of more money because they live overseas, but at the same time may plan to build a second home at the place of origin—the traditional site at the lagoon could be the appropriate spot.

Excursus: *Malae* and *Fale* in Poutasi – A look at Geometric Forms

Already at first glance the design of the traditional Sāmoan architecture appears to the observer as an image of perfect harmony. Today there are only a few remains of an architecture which only fifty years ago was totally normal for Sāmoan villages (cf.: Fig. 2). More than 60 percent of the houses in Poutasi were *faleo’o* (ordinary living house) and almost 30 percent were either *faletele* (representative round house) or *fale āfolau* (representative long house, cf.: fig. 14 and 15).

Figure 14: *Faletele* and *Fale āfolau* in Aleipata, Upolu 1996.



(Source: Author)

Figure 15: *Faleo'o* in Aleipata, 1996.



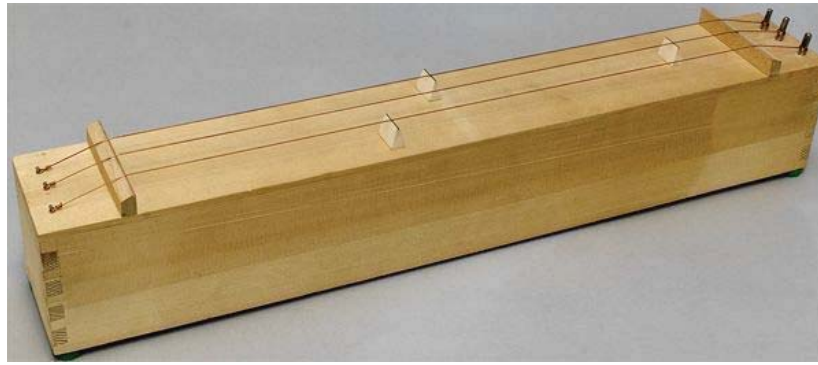
(Source: Author)

Looking at the shapes and the ground plan of this square and its surrounding buildings (Fig. 16) the observer immediately is taken by three perceptions: firstly by the regularity of forms, secondly by the geometric shape of the forms and thirdly by the symmetry and proportionality of the spatial structure which these forms hold in relation to the central square and in relation to each other. Having in mind the geometry of ancient and historical European architecture and famous architectures of other parts of the world, especially architectural ground plans of places in Asia and South America, one cannot avoid thinking that the basic forms of traditional Sāmoan architecture follow the same ideas of shaping, design and structure, thus making part of a universal architectural language of form.

In the ancient world the architectural and spatial leitmotiv can be characterized by the rule "*ordo, pondo et mensura, artem sine scientia nihil est*" (structure, weight and measure; there is no art without science). Science in these times has to be understood as mathematics and this motto goes back to experiments of Pythagoras who according to a legend after accidentally listening to the sound of certain tones coming from a blacksmith's workshop experienced feelings of well-being. The systematic experiments which he then carried out led to the antique school of thought which held that, just as the proportions we perceive in sounds produce harmonies and give pleasure to the ear, we have similar feelings of happiness whenever our eyes fall upon spatial structures created on the basis of the same proportions (Giorgi 1525, Palladio 1560, Staab 2010, Zarlino 1573; cf. also Hennings et al. 2016).

The relationship between the mathematical aspect of a proportion and its musical aspect can be demonstrated by a device which looks like a musical instrument made of an oblong sound box with a string stretched lengthwise along it. With the help of a crosspiece this string can be divided up into mathematically exact sections between its two extreme ends (1 and 0), i.e. proportions. If, for example, starting from the left to the right we shorten the string to three quarters of its total length we obtain a sound which is a fourth higher than the unison or prime; if we shorten the string to half of its total length we obtain a sound which is an octave higher than the prim (Fig. 16).

Figure 16: Monochord and its proportions.

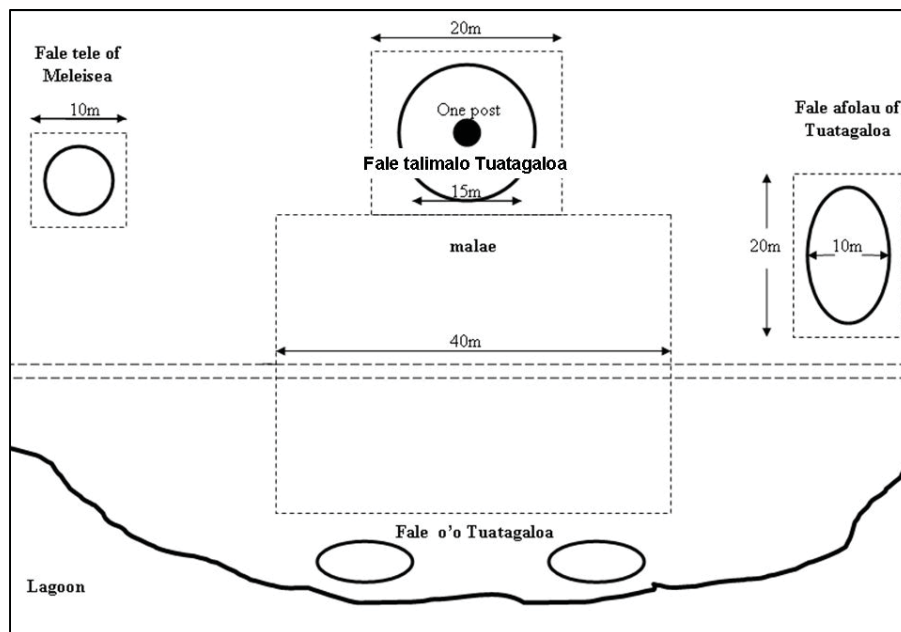


(Source: Wikipedia)

The ensemble of the village square and its surrounding buildings is formed by five different geometric figures: the square and the rectangle, the circle and the oval, not to forget the point, all basic forms of the architectural theory of classical antiquity and its textbooks (Vitruv) as well as their followers in the renaissance and baroque (Alberti, Palladio, Serlio).

The geometric measures for a *fale tele* are 3 in height and 4 in length, i.e. a proportion of 3:4 and those for a *fale āfolau* are 1 in height and 2 in length, i.e. a proportion of 1:2 (cf.: The Sāmoan *fale* 1992); we will come back to the architectural significance of these measures in the context of the geometric forms of the village square in Poutasi.

Figure 17: Spatial proportions of the village square in Poutasi in the 1950s.



(Source: Author draft on the basis of descriptions of contemporaries interviewed in 1989)

The proportion of a square is 1:1 because it is equal in length and width, consequently the measure of a square is 1, perfect harmony according to the ancient architectural paradigm. The same applies to the proportion of a circle (1:1) because its radius from the central point to the margin is always the same; consequently the measure of a circle is also 1, perfect harmony. Except for the squares and circles around the village square we perceive rectangles and ovals. Both forms derive from the square and the circle, they take their shape by distorting the original form. In the given cases of the houses of the Tuatagaloa family the rectangles of the basements and the ovals of

the ground plans measure 1 in width and 2 in length, i.e. a proportion of 1:2, a harmony which comes next to the perfect measure 1. These proportions of the square are in perfect harmony with the proportions of the buildings in their sectional elevation: the *faletele* generally has a proportion of 3:4 and a *fale āfolau* of 1:2.

Mathematical proportions are a formally unassailable method to establish order in the world of forms between uniformity and variety. Applied to music, art and architecture mathematical proportions constitute an essential condition for aesthetics. The architectural and spatial proportions found on and around the village square of Poutasi musically can be expressed as follows: 1:1 (1) is a prime, the perfect unison, 1:2 is an octave, in the hierarchy of proportions coming next to the perfect unison and 3:4 is a fourth, also high up in that very hierarchy.

The message going along with the architecture and spatial structure of the village square and its surrounding buildings could be expressed like this: The perfect and almost perfect proportions tell of a community in harmony, a community in which every family and every individual has its firmly defined place in the social ranking and hierarchy which is most transparently and publicly reflected by the spacing's of the settlements in the old village situated at the lagoon. The perfectly proportioned measure of the place may allude to the mythology according to which the two high chief titles directly originate from a son of the supreme god.

Is it legitimate to understand the Sāmoan architectural and spatial proportions as analogous to European antiquity? Maybe not; but it is food for thought to consider that outside of Europe we find similar geometric forms and proportions in the architectural history of many other parts of the world and hundreds and even thousands of years ago: in Mexico (Maya temples), in Peru (Inca temples), Cambodia (Ankor wat temples) and Indonesia (temple of Borobudur, Java). In all cases the predominant geometric forms are the rectangle and the circle. It is very probable that in all advanced civilizations architecture and space were shaped according to similar proportional measures intended to cause feelings of harmony and well-being in the persons looking at them.

The Old Village Nucleus of Poutasi – A place of Social Identity

The traditional village square of Poutasi at the lagoon can be read as a spatial text; it is a narrative place reflecting the social structure of the village as it is told in Sāmoan mythology and laid down in the *fa'alupēga*. In earlier times the *malae* even was some kind of 'sacred' place—it was forbidden to make loud noises while walking across it. If someone rode a bicycle through the village they had to dismount and wheel the bicycle across by hand. I can remember from my first visit to Poutasi that on Sunday it was forbidden to walk across the *malae* except for attending church service. Anyone who wanted to pass from one end of the village to the other strictly had to use a small path north of the square through bush land and swamp. The message of the spatial narration of the *malae* is dedicated to the public, i.e. to all villagers, to their community. The village square (*malae*) is the place for special festivities like the welcome of official foreign visitors and the organization of games like cricket matches or dance shows. The central building of the square is used as the *fale fonu*, the village council, public place for the meetings of the social groups of the village: *fonu matai* (meeting of the chiefs, the elected heads of the families), the meeting of the Women's Committee (comprising all adult female members of the village) and the meeting of the *'aumāga* (meeting of the *taulele'a*, i.e. all untitled men of the village).

Figure 18: The village square of Poutasi and festivities.



- (1) The square in the early 80s with traditional architecture
- (2) The high chiefs of the village with their orator addressing to a high ranking visitor
- (3) Ladies of the Women's Committee preparing for the welcome of the visitor
- (4) A group of untitled men presenting the traditional gift for the visitor
- (5) Ladies of the Women's Committee performing a dance

(Source: Author)

The central public sphere was flanked by the representative buildings of the two *ao ali'i*, the two high chiefs of the village, one living in a *fale āfolau* east of the square (long house of Tuatagaloa), whereas west of the square were the two *faletele* (round houses) of Meleisea. Both the *fale āfolau* of the Tuatagaloa title and the two *faletele* of the Meleisea title were by houses in European bungalow style (*fale palāgi*) as well as smaller and simpler open Sāmoan houses (*faleo'o*).

Again next to these buildings and in a very symmetrical order follows another public space: East of the *fale āfolau* of the Tuatagaloa family is the place of the Congregational Church and west of the *faletele* of the Meleisea family is the place of the community hall of the Congregational Church and the residence of the congregational minister. To both sides of these buildings, symmetrically located to the west and to the east we find the places of the *tulāfale* (orators) and the places of the *usoli'i* (lower ranking chiefs), all kinsmen of the two high chiefs.

Figure 19: Malae and *Fale tālimālō* used today as *Fale fonu* of Poutasi in 2006.



(Source: Author)

The *fale tālimālō* (guest-house) of the Tuatagaloa was built in 1960s by Tuatagaloa Simaile—used to receive guests and hold meetings. The Meleisea *fale tālimālō* was destroyed in the tsunami and was also used in the past as a *fale fonu*.

The central positions of the traditional village nucleus are taken by the *malae* and the *fale tālimālō* (used today as *fale fonu*) (Fig. 19). At first sight the building seems to be identical with all other Sāmoan *fale fonu* and *faletele*. But whereas in all “normal” *faletele* everywhere in Sāmoa the roof construction is based on the wall posts (Fig. 19.1, *pou lalo*), in the Poutasi *fale fonu* this function is taken over by the central post (Fig. 19.2, *pou tūloto*).

Figure 20: *Faletele* based on lateral posts(19.1) and on a central post (19.2)

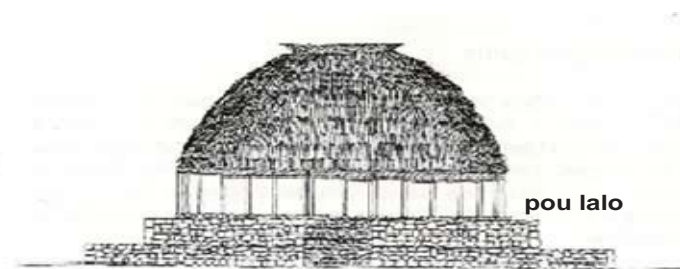


Figure 19.1

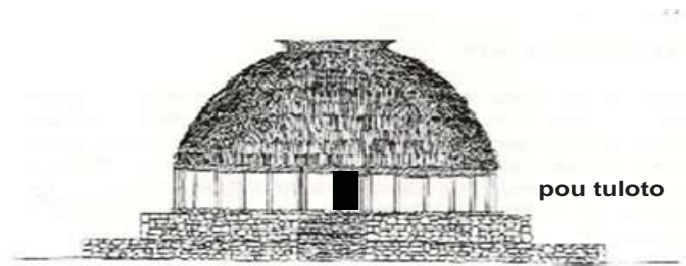


Figure 19.2

(Source: UNESCO 1992: 77)

This special construction of the central post is crucial to set the final point in understanding the spatial narration of the old village of Poutasi. Seen from the bird's eye perspective the central post appears as a point, i.e. a geometric form already mentioned in the excursus but not taken up until now. The point may be defined as one element, if not the constitutive one, of geometry. Pythagoras defined the point as a unit which has a position and Euclid describes the point as something which does not have parts, i.e. something which is not divisible, an axiom. In any case the point is a concept which is decisive in the sense that it is constitutive for other axioms: The first axiom of Hilbert's system defines as first axiom: two non-identical points (P and Q) determine a straight line (Wikipedia).

The big house of Tuatagaloa, his *fale tālimālō*, used today as *fale fonu*, and situated directly north of the village square (*malae*), has only one post, echoing the name of the village—Poutasi (literally 'one post').¹ Though today often used as *fale fonu* this house one of two *fale tālimālō* (houses for receiving guests) the other, belonging to Meleisea, was used also used as *fale fonu* before the 1990 cyclone when it was destroyed.

In the case of Poutasi the most prominent geometric form of a point is located in the centre of the *fale fonu*; it is this point upon which everything of the building (now the most prominent building of the village) is based on. In the architecture of the building the roof is based on one post only; seen in the bird's eye view the post is nothing but a point. With the help of a set of different beams and rafters this one post carries the whole construction of the roof; the lateral pillars have a more or less decorative and assisting role (Fig. 21).

Figure 21: Fale fonu Poutasi: "One post"



(Source: Author)

The central post of the *faletele* used as *fale fonu* today thus is the point, the central pillar which makes the place unique and unmistakable. The theoretical concept of identity in a social context is defined as being such as all others, but with regard to the individual context identity means to be

¹ The name is said to originate from the legend of Tuisamoa who was given Falealili by Malietoa Faiga and who built his house there with this one post only, which was said to be built in the manner of Fiji.

such as no other. Poutasi viewed from a sociological and architectural perspective appears to be as all other Sāmoan villages because it has the same social and architectural features, but there are a few details in its social order and its architectural structure in the context of the village square that make it unique and unmistakable among all other Sāmoan villages. The nucleus of the old village of Poutasi tells of the local identity of Poutasi and its people.

After the destructive effect of the tsunami and the reconstruction of the major part of the houses further inland at the road the village has not only lost its central public square but at the same time that ensemble of atmospheric quality and symbolic effects of the place which made the village unique and unmistakable. The *Fale tālimālō* of Tuatagaloa with the one central post withstood the tsunami but the *malae*, the public square in front of it, now appears to be an empty and almost dead place because it is no longer bustling with village people because life now has shifted to the main road. Up to now the majority of the village people are not aware of the social implications of this recent spatial development, but if there is no revival of the traditional village nucleus the consequence of this will be that an important part of the Sāmoan spatial archives definitely threatens to be lost.

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