“Teu le va”: mediating Va through mobile communication in Samoa and its diaspora

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Abstract:

This paper is based on one of the first ethnographic accounts of mobile phones in Samoa conducted by the author from December 2013 to November 2014. It is based in a traditional Samoan village and attributes *fa’amatai or* the socio-metric wheel of a traditional Samoan village to the low uptake of mobile phones. In 2007 Samoa had 70,000 mobile phone subscribers predominantly in the capital, Apia. Findings from this research state that collective village activities and cultural expectations impedes the place mobility of the mobile phone further reducing its usage in the village. This paper surfaces the various forms of indigenous communication to demonstrate how village co ’ordination limits mobile phone use in a traditional Samoan village. It identifies what is not considered ‘media’ in a global north context and demonstrates how communication intermediaries like *va (*the space in-between), village pathways and cultural connections are examples of indigenous communicative assemblages that are essential to village communication.

Introduction:

The privatisation of telecommunications in 2005 Samoa opened a competitive market between Irish-owned, Caribbean-based mobile provider Digicel and American Samoa-based mobile provider, Bluesky Corporation; extending mobile accessibility and affordability to the nation (MCIT, 2006, Meese & Chan Mow 2016, Muliaumaseai’i 2017, Russell, 2013). In December 2013 baseline research was conducted to investigate emerging themes and trends in the Information Communication and Technology space in Samoa.

Four weeks of ethnography identified the contrast of the high mobile usage in Apia and low uptake in rural areas. Further investigation was required to understand what variables were responsible for the low mobile usage in village Samoa. The next 9 months of ethnography were focused on the concept of *va* (the space in-between) and whether it was being influenced and changed by mobile phone practices in rural Samoa? This research investigated how the mobile phone fit into the communicative ecology of a traditional Samoan village that uses Indigenous means of communication. How does the village communicate to its families without the aid of technology? One wonders what indigenous tools or methods are used to pass on messages to individuals, alert the whole village of the curfew and keep families accountable to the collective schedule dictated by the *Ali'i* (High Chief of the village) and council of chiefs (Muliaumaseali'i 2017, 2022).

A Small Samoan Village

Island Breeze is the pseudonym for the site of this ethnographic research. A coastal Samoan village with the Pacific Ocean as its breathtaking backdrop and continuous bursts of sea breezes rolling in. Island Breeze is on the main island of Upolu (Savai'i is the other island) has a population of less than 500 people and is located in a district with a population of 4,546 (Muliaumaseali'i 2017, 2022) The village is organized around a *malae* which is a large open space where meetings are held, that faces the ocean. It is surrounded by homes ranging from the traditional *fale* (Samoan house) to the conventional three-to-four-bedroom house typically found in Western countries. Some houses are modest, while others reflect the "wealth" or high ranking of the families. Coastal villages are vulnerable to damage from seasonal cyclones and storms. In 2009, a tsunami destroyed most structures in the villages (Muliaumaseali'i 2017, 2022, Wendt 2009). The villagers rely mainly on local crops and support from family abroad for income. Those lucky enough to be in fulltime

employment have moved closer to Apia the urbanised part of the island (Muliaumaseali'i 2017, 2022).

Indigenous Methods of Communication.

To give context to some of the indigenous means of communication that will be highlighted, I'd like to briefly introduce the Samoan concept of space called the va or the space in-between (Airini…

Samoan scholar Albert Wendt describes va as "the space between, the between-ness, not empty space, not space that separates but space that relates, that holds separate entities and things together in the Unity-that-is-All" (Grace et al. 1999, pg.402).

It is the space in between kin, family, and community where harmony and unity are prioritized (Lui 2003) also known as the *va fealoaloa'i* or relational space (Muliaumaseali'I 2017, …..) The va is premised on a sacred covenant between a Samoan man and his 'sister' who is all females that live in the village as kinship is not only based on bloodlines but also cultural lands or the land that the village sits on. Samoans situate a person based on the village they are from and your family name (Muliaumaseali'i 2017, Suaalii-Sauni, T.2010)

The first environment where a Samoan will learn about the va is in the home, within the *aiga* (family). Central to *fa'asamoa* (Samoan way of life), the aiga is a place of nurturing of language, customs, and values. Fundamental to the success of unity of the aiga is va and how one will teu le va or nurture the space in-between (Airni et al 2010; Muliaumaseali'i 2017; Tiatia 2012; Grace et al. 1999). This concept governs relationships and the way in which one relates to the other. This develops our understanding of how the *va* interweaves in the everyday communication of Island Breeze and aids in finding answers to how the mobile phone slots into the communicative ecologies of Island Breeze.

Communicative Ecology Mapping

The concept of communicative ecologies was first used in Sri Lanka on a project that used Ethnographic Action Research (EAR) by Slater, Lewis and Tacchi (2003). It takes a multi-method approach to involve users or target groups to understand them and their social, cultural, economic, and political environments. It is also an important tool for understanding and further developing media and communication initiatives in local contexts. A foundational concept of EAR is communicative ecologies, which involves paying attention to wider contexts of information and communication flows and channels, formal and informal, technical and social; to understand communication opportunities and barriers (Tacchi 2014). Island Breeze relies on indigenous communication tools and announcements to structure their daily routines. Although technologies such as television, radio, and landline telephones changed the ways that people receive information, they are consumed alongside family members and neighbours. The addition of the mobile phone to this context fuels social uncertainty, as Samoans are concerned about how mediated interactions are changing social and personal relationships (Muliaumaseali'i 2017).

The ability of the mobile phone to converge communication needs for individuals into one single device means that it provides individuals with an agency that many rural Samoans are unfamiliar with (Muliaumaseali'i 2017) and invokes the question of how the mobile slots into the communicative ecology of village Samoa. Empirical evidence demonstrates the ways in which communication structures time, space, and the flow of information in Island Breeze. Mapping the communicative ecology of village Samoa requires understanding the environment and how the village operates. One way to describe communicative ecologies is a web or network of information and communication that individuals or groups interact with daily. The diversity of how people communicate and relate to information provides nuanced flows of information and communication (Finding a Voice 2015). Communicative

ecology mapping is a tool that identifies the processes that involve people communicating with others in their social networks, both face-to-face and using a combination of media and communication technologies (Tacchi, Slater & Hearn, 2003). Mapping the communicative ecology of the *nu'u* (village) is the first step in identifying this web or communication structure, processes, and tools found within its organisation. The va, as a form of verbal and non-verbal communication, is part of the communicative ecologies of Island Breeze that weaves the components of the village's communicative structure together (Muliaumaseali'i 2017,2022) Communicative ecology mapping provided a holistic view of Island Breeze, enabling an understanding of how, why and where the mobile phone was being integrated into the village's communicative ecologies or whether it was being used in way that it created its own niche.

Making Sense of Village Noises

The first interface was the types of communication used in the village and identifying the different communicative media. The village's traditional means of communication was a starting point followed by understanding how the information communication technologies are used in the village. Village communication included things like the wooden drum, the conch shell, and the church bell. These tools have a broadcast model of communication. An example is the church bell that sounds when there has been a death in the village or when it is time for prayer. This sender- receiver mode of communication is consistent in all village communication and reflects the structural hierarchy of the village. Decisions made at the top two levels made up of high ranked chiefs and titled chiefs, are adhered to by all. One participant explained that Island Breeze was also known as a village with "one voice, *e tasi le leo" (*Intvw:06) which means that all villagers understood the Chief Council made all the rules, curfews, and restrictions for the betterment of the village. It is va that upholds and brings all

these elements together.

Mapping the nuanced communication in the village was done through observations and taking note of the types of village ‘noises’ that occurred throughout the day. The church bell is the first communication tool that alerts the village for the day. The Catholic church have the Prayer of the Angel, at 5:30am every day, the bell sounds to remind the Catholic members to beginthe Prayer of the *Agelu* (Angel). Parishioners are expected to pray wherever they are in remembrance of Mother Mary and the Immaculate Conception. At 6:00am the bell sounds again as a reminder that Mass service commences at 6.30am. This alerted the village to what time it was: regardless of what religious affiliation, you knew that it was 5:30am. It was becoming clear that village communication was widely accepted and that all generations were able to relate to it. The mobile phone, on the other hand, was not used by all village members. In fact, most did not really understand how to use it. Low levels of usage could also be attributed to the cost of buying a mobile phone and maintaining one. Participants who were gifted with a smartphone from a relative living overseas complained that they could only use it to text and receive calls because they were not sure how to use the other functions. To activate these functions, one needed data. Not having the resources to fully utilise the mobile phone has been a barrier to integration.

The village communication patterns observed reflected the collectivism (Podsiadlowski & Fox, 2011) of *fa’asamoa* (Samoan way of life) and further enhance the socio-metric wheel of the fa’amatai system. The slow toll of the bell means that there hasbeen a death in the village. The conch shell being blown at 6:30.am on Saturday morning means the Komiti are meeting at the president’s house in 2 hours. Although messages are still passed on through face-to-face communication, the mobile phone has sped up this process via text messages. Not everyone owns a mobile phone, but people are aware of those who do, and any

changes to meetings are passed on through text to the network of mobile owners who, in turn, alert other village members via sending someone to verbally relay the message. Slater (2013) describes the passing of messages from mobile phone to another party via face-to-face messenger as a form of communicative assemblages. Slater (2013) further points out terms that emanate from a global north perspective, such as communicative assemblages and 'media,' do not necessarily make sense in a global south context.

The mobile phone, when viewed as an active agent for change, requires an appreciation of the part it plays within its setting to understand its contribution (or lack thereof) in a specific social and economic context. To demonstrate the nuanced setting of a Samoan village, this research returns to the concept of *va* as a code of conduct and a means of communicating. In addition to this is Hau'ofa's (1994) Sea of Islands, in which he argues that we should view the ocean as a pathway, a connection or a further extension of Pacific people, rather than a body of water separating the islands. This research states these two indigenous perspectives play a major role in how the mobile phone is perceived in Island Breeze. The following sections will illustrate how this holistic perspective creates different meanings for everyday manifestations in this global south context.

Text Message or Messenger

The landscape of Island Breeze is mostly natural flora uninhibited by high rise buildings or apartments that require messy power cables or telephone lines to be functional. Coconut palms are joined by a string of power poles lining the road. The odd telephone cable is spotted and although mobile activity is present there are no mobile phone towers in sight. The landscape is like a metaphor for the communication ecologies of the village; it is simple and uses natural means of communication with a mix of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as television, radio, landlines, and mobile phones. One day, my

attention to the landscape was interrupted by three teenage girls approaching my house. They were the daughters of the local women I had been training in office and administration skills. They greeted me and gave me a note from their mother, hand-written in the Samoan language. She was apologetic for interrupting my Saturday morning and for not having any credit on her phone to text me. The girls had walked 1 kilometre to my house to deliver a note requesting a loan to buy a giftfor Father's Day. It was not the first note that had been delivered to me since I became a part of the village. My introduction to the women's group was soon followed by unexpected visits to my home by children with handwritten messages requesting help or women would just drop in unannounced to ask a question or chat. It's not that they did not have access to mobile phones to text or call me; it was partly because face-to-face is the usual mode of communication, especially when requesting assistance with something, as *upu fa'aloalo* (words of respect) is the protocol for this kind of communication and indicates respecting the va. It was also more economical to send a note or just drop in for a visit. I only encountered three ladies in the women's group that used their phones to communicate with me, and after a few visits to my house it wasn't long before they would send me 'please call me' text messages or texts requesting that I top up their phones with $1.00 *tala* (dollar) when they had no prepaid credit. These interactions indicated that the low uptake of mobile phones in urban Samoa is because face-to-face communication is still preferred and a combination of cultural, geographic, and economic factors and the principles of va. Most interactionsrequire certain protocols to be followed for which, participants state, mobile phone use is not appropriate. The proximity of the houses and the organisation of village communication also undermine the need for mobile communication. The cost of sending a text or making a phone call is not unreasonable ($0.20 *sene* a text), but a lack of disposable income within each household

leads to decisions to save ‘precious’ mobile credit for emergencies or more ‘important’ things. Anything in between these criteria could be dealt with by sending a messenger or communicated personally.

Payphones and Public Conversations

Prior to the arrival of mobile phones, the local shop charged locals to use their landline; however, this service was not available after they closed at 7:00pm. There are two shops in the village: one at the entrance to the village and one at the end. The shop at the entrance is bigger in size and has more stock. It was once the only shop that provided a public telephone for the village. Locals share stories about queuing up to use the phone and feeling self-conscious about others overhearing their conversations. The other downside was that the shop owner would know who they were calling and why they needed to make the call. If the customer was young or had no ranking, the shop owner would usually precede the phone service by asking the customer who they wanted to call and why. People without power also lacked privacy. One participant, *Laga* (pseudonym) remembers having to walk three kilometres to the local shop to use their landline. It was inconvenient to walk there, especially when it rained, and you had to contend with noise in the shop and other people listening to your conversation. She recalls that prior to any landlines in the village, locals had to travel two to three hours on the bus or hitch a ride to the telephone exchange in Apia. There, Laga would queue for at least an hour to make a three- minute call for $4.00 *tala,* although on most occasions she would call collect. The bus fare cost between $10-$12.00 tala, but if she had extra things to do, she would stay with relatives in town. This incurred more costs because a gift of food or money is the suitable way of respecting the va when staying with relatives.

Prior to the shop providing this service, the only landline in the village belonged to the high chief. The participants recall having the landline in the mid to late 1970's when they could use if the chief gave his permission, and a fee was charged. The chief's house soon became the telephone exchange, and family members living abroad would call this number if they needed to get in touch with their family. Sometimes a call would be made from overseas for someone who lived on the other side of the village. The caller would be asked to call back in 15 minutes and a messenger, usually a youth, would be sent to the recipient's house to let them know that had a call from overseas. This also left no room for privacy, but the only other alternative was a bus ride to Apia to themain telephone exchange or to receive a letter in the post.

Most phone calls from overseas were usually for a *fa'alavelave* (important family issue) as the cost of phone calls did not allow for leisurely conversation or a good old catch-up. Phone calls were usually to advise of a funeral, matters that required raising finances, or decisions around cultural and family matters. A huge benefit of owning amobile phone is that it provides the individual with privacy. Individuals can receive and make phone calls without the village knowing about them, and with family members abroad absorbing the cost of the call; communication is not a financial burden. These obvious transitions create an easy 'fit' for the mobile phone. However, the traditional communicative ecologies of village Samoa are stabilised and routine, whereas a transition from landlines to mobiles is not as linear. All my participants indicated that privacy was high on the list of benefits of owning a mobile phone. The privacy of the mobile phone has created 'new' uses and instigated a moral ambivalence that Samoa is still coming to terms with. An increase in teenage pregnancies and extra -marital affairshave all been 'credited' to the privacy of the

mobile phone and its role in blurring the va between male and female relationships. I first explore why the mobile phone holds less appeal for village Samoans.

Conch Shells

The conch shell is another frequent and effective means of communicating in the village. The village council, comprised of all ranked matai of the village, meet on the first Monday of the month. The untitled men attend this meeting to serve the *matai* and carry out the *Kava* ceremony, a ritual of opening cultural meetings. This meeting is confirmed by the sound of the conch shell blown between 6:30am-7:00am. The meetings are held at the Pulenu'u or Mayor's house. The current Mayor lives three kilometres inland from the main road. The conch is blown early to give the chiefs and the *taulele'a (unranked men)* time to make their way, as many travel on foot. During these meetings mobile phones and other technologies are banned. The first meeting held during my ethnography lasted for twelve hours. Aside from general discussion pertaining to village governance, warnings are also issued. Two men in the village were fined $800 *tala* and 10 *pusa apa* (boxes of tinned fish) a fine that in total amounts to $1500 *tala* ($750.00AUD). The men were fined because they became drunk and caused a fight in the neighbouring village. They were infringing on the village curfew by trying to drive through the village during the curfew Most villages have a curfew known as the sa, in which everyone in the village must be inside for devotions. Some villages do not allow any cars to pass until an hour later when the curfew is lifted. These are the sorts of issues brought to the council meetings. Other issues that have gone before the council are rumours of affairs where the parties involved, including the person who reported the affair, are brought before the council. A court- like session is held in which the person is called upon to give evidence and the accused defend themselves or admit guilt. The harshest penalty delivered has been banishment from the village. Council meetings take most of the

day as the issues and events of the month are discussed and incidents where the va has been violated are discussed and penalties issued to *teu le va or nurture the space in-between,* to ensure the fa'amatai of the village is in order.

Komiti Meetings, the Coconut Wireless and Face-to-Face Communication

The women's *Komiti* (committee*)* operates in a similar manner, but meets more frequently than the village council. The mayor's wife is responsible for organising the Komiti's conch shell alert, which is blown at 7:00am at least ten times. This notifies the women of the Komiti that they need to get their morning chores done and assemble at the presidents' house by 8:30.am. These meetings are usually held to discuss any decisions made at the village council that affect them and to alert them of upcoming events for the month, such as working bees, weaving workshops, etc. Dates and venues are confirmed, and the women are advised that the conch will sound when they are expected on that day. If there are any changes to the meeting time or venue a text message (or messenger) is sent to the mayor's wife, who sounds the conch shell at the new appointed time. The women carry on with their day until they hear the conch shell (or don't hear it, as the conch shell is not blown when a meeting is cancelled). Unlike the mobile phone, this method of communication is a broadcast model; that is, a sender-message-receiver model that does not require or allow any response from the receiver. It is a village code that works on the assumption that everyone required will play their roles, and any absences are noted.

The Coconut Wireless

"Coconut wireless" is a term that explains the method of communication known as 'word of mouth' in a Pacific Island context or 'face-to-face' in Internet jargon. It is no surprise that in a small village 'word' gets around aboutunusual events, people's private lives, and general life in the village. Although in a Western context discussing someone else's private business is

considered to be gossip, in the rural village it is almost a ‘right’ and a form of nurturing and policing the va fealoaloa’i (relational space). At one meeting the president, and the next-ranked matai were giving advice to the women about raisingteenagers. This resulted from hearing ‘whispers’ that a teenager in the village was dropping out of school after failing the national exams twice. Community discourse on this matter alternated between motivation and encouragement to scolding the mothers for not doing a better job. For those who are not employed in Apia and live off the land, being part of the village automatically places you in this forum, and in most cases you have no choice but to hear whatever ruling or advice is given out. This method of communication is how locals and the committee ‘police’ the village, a method that blurs the line between gossip about a person’s privacy and their duty to report ‘questionable’ behaviour. Here, the mobile phone plays a minor role as all of these incidents are reported using face-to-face communication. This is due mainly to the protocol involved when addressing the *faletua o sa’o* (Highest ranked female in the village) the language of respect (*upu fa’aloalo*) is used in recognition of the va in the hierarchy. It requires the *faletua’s* response and indication that the person may continue to speak on the issue they were bringing to their attention. This makes any communication via text message inappropriate. Moreover, conducting such an exchange on a phone cost too much, and in any case, both leaders are well into their seventies, and they find technology confusing. Although they were both persuaded by family to own a phone, they rarely used them as they prefer simple methods of communication over the mobile phone.

Face-to-Face Encounters

For most face-to-face encounters (especially with people of rank), upu fa’aloalo (words of respect) are exchanged to respect the *va.* In my dealings with the women in the Komiti, I found that even though I had exchanged mobile numbers with some of them*,* only three of

the fifteen women responded to me via text. Most of my communication with the other women was through the passing of hand-written notes to me by their children or via a personal visit by them. On many occasions I had random visitors in my house requesting that I do something to assist them vocationally, educationally, or financially. A lack of finance was one of the reasons the other twelve women did not use their mobile phones: otherwise, it was a case of choosing to use their credit for a 'better' reason.

Moving Through Space: Buses and Foot Traffic

Motorised transportation in Samoa usually involves two primary modes: buses and taxis. Not many villagers own private vehicles, so their options for transport are buses, taxi, or walking. Taxis are available but are used in the village if it is too hot to walk or there is an urgent need to get around the village otherwise, they are seen as existingprimarily for tourists or people who live in town. In Samoa, buses are an economical option, costing $6.00 *tala* ($3AUD) to go one way to Apia, whereas a taxi is $60.00 *tala* ($30AUD) one way. Buses can be hailed down anywhere enroute, and customers can signal to stop the bus close as the doorstep of their destination. The only timetable that people are aware of is that they are on the road from 5:30am and return to the village between 5:00-7:00pm. It takes two hours to get to Apia from Island Breeze. Locals have calculated that the final bus to Apia passes through the village between 2:30-3:00pm. The busiest times are between 5:30am-8:00am and after 5:00pm. Many villagers commute from the village to work or schools in neighbouring villages or Apia. Samoan buses or *pasi* have wooden seats, are uncomfortable, and are renowned for having the loudest and the latest music playing during the trip. Many drivers use this as a marketing ploy to attract their customers. When the bus is full the men have the right to take the seat of a male or female youth and have them sit on their lap for the rest of the journey.In my experience as a youth living in Samoa

this has been an uncomfortable and awkward journey, but the act of submission is seen as respecting the va. Before the mobile phone, the bus route was the best way to deliver messages and goods to family members on the island. People would write messages and have them delivered by the bus driver to a relative who lived far away. Horst and Taylor's (2014) study in Haiti engages with Haitian migrants who use the mobile phone to mediate different forms of mobility. Their study encompasses the relationship between new mobile technologies and other objects of mobility. Like the Samoans, Haitian's use mobile phones, money, clothing, and identity cards (for Haitians) as a means to facilitate mobility (Pg.2). In Samoa,un-accompanied goods (food, tools, and plants) would be placed with the bus driver, who would get $5 *tala* for his trouble. This would buy a soft drink and a pie or 150 megabytes of data. When an urgent message was needed to be sent and an immediate response received, a family member would make the trip across the island and stay with their relatives for a night. If they needed to stay longer the bus driver would deliver a message to their families at home on their return route. The mobile phone enhances this practise and provides an efficient means of confirming whether the goods or message has arrived. It can save a day's journey when an urgent message needs to be sent. These two examples illustrate how new media enters into the "wider communicative processes of the locale" (Slater, 2013, pg. 31), establishing the mobile phone as an intermediary that makes up communicative assemblages.

Foot Traffic

Walking is one of the primary means of transport for residents of Island Breeze. It is not common for villagers to catch a bus to get to one end of the village, since buses are unpredictable and considered to be a waste of money when a person is only travelling two or three kilometres down the road. *Alofa*, a local woman that assisted in my research, has

sometimes caught a taxi home after work. It is 1.5 kilometres from the office to her house and costs $3.00SAT. The cheapest option for getting from one part of village to another is therefore by foot. Culturally, it is polite to acknowledge any person that you pass or see sitting under the shelter of their fale. An acknowledgement can be in the form of a greeting or saying 'I see you're on your way?' They may respond positively, and you will close off with 'well, blessing as you go.'They will then return the blessing. This protocol holds for any person you meet, whether you know them or not. Most times this turns into a long conversation where information is exchanged and new facts about something happening in the village are discovered. This is part of communal living and maintaining the va. Usually, the elderly greet you and ask about your business; if this is of interest to them more questions are asked. This is another example of how information is spread throughout the village. It was during one of these 'random' conversations that I happened upon much-needed information. I was helping one of the women clean the front yard of the office. While we were doing our work, a woman was walking past the yard and my co-worker greeted her by asking where she had just come from. The passer-by then went into a full story about her day and the unexpected meeting that was called for the female matais of the Komiti. The monthly meeting was being brought forward, and each matai had to prepare for this. I had been planning to attend the next Komiti meeting to introduce myself to the women and advise them of my research. It was very fortunate that we caught word that the meeting had been brought forward as I was planning to be in Apia on that day and now, I could change my plans to attend.

The practise of greeting a person and politely inquiring into their business continues to be the quickest way information is circulated. The sending of a family member to one part of the village to relay a message is the preferred method of village communication. It does

not cost anything and is deemed more reliable than sending atext message or making a phone call because people do not always have credit to return the call. The only other method of communicating to someone that they do not have any credit is by requesting a $1-2.00 *tala* top up, otherwise they will write a note and have one of the village kids deliver it. It is also during these errands that the messenger could be met by an elder who inquiries about this person's business and information is exchanged.

The Changing Communicative Ecologies of Island Breeze

A key contention of this research is to understand the impacts of media, one must consider the complexities of the environment that the technology has entered into. Consideration of *va* as part of the communicative ecologies of a Samoan village is critical. An outsider's first impressions of a Samoan village may be that it boasts a sedentary and 'laid back' lifestyle, with its thatched roofs and corrugated and wooden structures, with a background of rolling waves and coconut palms enhancing this stereotype. However, In a Samoan rural context, the landscape is far more than an idyllic backdrop; it is considered to be part of the region's communicative ecologies. Knowing these idiosyncrasies is essential if one is to come close to capturing a 'real' picture of the community. Village Samoa engages bell tolls, written messages, and face-to-face communication to accomplish most of their communication needs, but definitions of "media" emanating from the global North rarely include these kinds of communications as Slater (2013) argues, the importance of researchers understanding localised media terms to obtain a 'real' picture of the community they are studying. Placing certain mechanics under the "media" umbrella would probably suit project and funding criteria but would overlook the richness of the unique setting. The term 'communicative assemblages' is not used in village Samoa, yet it is clearly relevant to the mechanisms ofcommunication they practice every day. These

processes all become part of a communicative algorithm (Slater 2013,pg 64) that equates to ICTs (messenger+ note + road + bus + reply via mobile phone = ICT) but it is debatable how necessary it is for locals to know these terms as they are being 'created' for a global north context. This research acknowledges that it is imperative to draw the nuanced parallels between Indigenous means of communication and the terms used in the global north. These terms were reconciled through communicative ecology mapping. In mapping the communicative ecologies of a community, the researcher is compelled to identify localised media objects and know the names and meanings within their context before they can be titled something that is coherent within academia for the purposes of a project description or a funding proposal.

Village Coordination, Micro-Coordination, and Iterative Coordination

The collective nature of village communication challenges Ling's notion that the mobile phone's ability to 'recast settings' enabling users to 'make up the rules' (Ling 2004, pg.22) as they go about transitioning from using a telephone with a fixed abode to a device that is on their own person, and which gives them the freedom to communicate on buses, in trains, and in public spaces. Village communication also minimises the need for micro-coordination, another term coined by Ling (2004) and used to describe the ways mobile phones are used for organising everyday activities and changing them on the 'fly' or as they happen (ibid.pg. 68). In many places around the world, the mobile phone has altered the coordination of everyday life. Society has had to move from the idea of time and time-keeping as fixed and set to what Ling terms 'softening of schedules' (ibid.pg 68-72), in which a person who is late to a meeting due to traffic is able to phone ahead and advise of their predicament and that the meeting should start. It is a mistake, however, to assume

that the mobile phone has instigated these changes universally.

In village Samoa the idea of time and time keeping is still ‘fixed’. Only the hierarchy has the power to reschedule or cancel a meeting on the ‘fly’ and it is unusual for a meeting to be rescheduled on the day. Any changes to council meetings are made known to participants’ days before the scheduled date and usually via word of mouth or through the blowing of the conch shell for a gathering of subordinates. The men’s village, for instance, may still need a quick meeting to carry out a working bee or projects around the village for that month. The word is spread that a council meeting is postponed, but the conch will sound for them to meet, and this is led by the son of one of the high chiefs. In the home, micro-coordination is limited because not everyone owns a mobile phone and generally everyone lives and works in the same vicinity. Rather than texting any changes to plans already made, it is usual that a messenger is sent to relay the changes and return with any messages. People travelling to town carry a mobile phone in case their family need to contact them for extra supplies or in case of an emergency. Sometimes the traveller takes the only mobile in the home, and so the traveller will contact their neighbours if they need to speak to their family. Vice versa, a family will call upon their neighbours for help if they need to contact the person in town. Ling (2004) argues that the concept of time and the punctuality associated with manners and courtesy are being readjusted as the mobile phone affords the option of ‘iterative coordination’ (ibib.pg. 72), in which the need to tie down a venue or meeting time is not necessary because it can be done in real time as the need arises. In Samoan society, especially in rural areas, there is no such concept of ‘iterative co-ordination’ during these traditional meetings, unless (as stated before) you are the high chief. There is still much emphasis on protocol and ritual, and despite the common saying that everything starts on ‘island time’ (runs behind schedule), once these

specific meetings start, it really is time for the 'island ways' to take precedence. Here punctuality is good manners and courtesy and is displayed via formality and protocol. The code of respect is observed throughout these meetings, hence the banning of mobile phones. This is not to say that Ling's concept of iterative co-ordination does not exist in village Samoa (it does), but in these meetings especially, those of rank have this privilege and decisions are relayed through traditional village communication.

Outside of these meetings, 'Island time' is still a practise. I have attended several meetings or special occasions in the village that have not started on time. At times I have arrived five minutes ahead of time and rather than be seated for the beginning of the event I became a helper in setting up the venue. Even in these moments the mobile phone has not been the first choice used to locate missing parties. Instead, a young person or someone of low or no ranking has been sent to the absentees' homes to hurry them along because the event has 'started.' Village coordination undermines the concepts of micro-coordination and iterative coordination, which further explains the limitations of mobile use in Island Breeze.

A Place for the Mobile Phone

To further my argument that mobile usage in Island Breeze is limited, I engage Hau'ofa's (1994) Sea of Islands, to compare the mobile phone's role as an intermediary with the holistic perspective that Pacific hold towards pathways such as the ocean and how this perspective equates to communicative assemblages. In a Pacific context, the selection of routes is not always decided by which route is the quickest or less congested, nor is it about choosing most scenic route. The road, paths, and bush trail are how locals connect to family and friends, gather information, receive and send money, deliver messages, and

travel. Hau’ofa (1994) argues that the ocean itself is a part of the Pacific islands. He depicts the ocean as a pathway, a connection or a further extension of Pacific people, rather than as a body of water separating the islands and states: There is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as ’islands in a far sea’ and as ‘a sea of islands.’ The first emphasizes dry surfaces in a vast ocean far from the centres of power. Focusing in this way stresses the smallness and remoteness of the islands. The second is a more holistic perspective in which things are seen in the totality of their relationships (Hau’ofa, 1994.pg 152-153) The same is to be said of pathways on the island of Samoa. Before there were roads, maps, and the Global Positioning System (GPS), Samoans were connected by bloodlines, tradition, and communal living. This study investigates how the mobile phone slots into this indigenous framework of communication. Is the mobile phone absorbed by the concept of ‘sea of islands,’ becoming an extension of Samoans? Or is it finding a niche in village communication as a communicative assemblage that meets the communication needs of the locals? Village Samoans engage in communicative assemblages that are usually independent of mobile technology. This research recognises the *va* as a communicative assemblage because it plays an intermediary role in communicating and receiving information and is part of fa’amatai. This system, which is embedded in fa’asamoa, continues its tradition of ensuring the village runs according to the village council rules, which are often conservative and traditional. 2016 marked a decade since the GSM (Global System for Mobile communication) mobile phone entered the Samoan market. My data indicates that, at this milestone for the industry, mobile users in village Samoa see the mobile phone as an alternative. The richness of the village’s communicative ecologies allows the villagers to default to traditional means of communication rather than the mobile phone. Although the mobile phone has provided infrastructural gains, often the

signal can be weak, yet another factor causing locals to rely more on face-to-face communication. Due to fa'amatai not being as important in urban areas as it is in rural Samoa, there is more 'freedom' to using the mobile phone and less infrastructural barriers such as a weak signal.

Conclusion

The ubiquity of the mobile phone has allowed users to be connected and contactable as much or as little as they want. In Island Breeze, however, indigenous means of communication are still predominantly used and the entry ofthe mobile phone into the Samoan market raises questions regarding how it fits into the communicative ecologies of a rural village. Although the mobile phenomenon has changed the ways that people communicate in developing contexts, environments influence the way the mobile phone has been appropriated. In Island Breeze, barriers that inhibit the full potential of mobile use are cultural, economic, and infrastructural. Lack of disposable income for texts and phone calls, coupled with weak signals, often prompt villagers to revert to the communicative assemblages usually engaged in accomplishing their communicative needs. The fa'amatai, a system of communication, *va* and its rich communicative ecology meets the communication needs of the village. The empirical evidence indicates that the communicative ecology of a Samoan village is complex and engages a myriad of communicative assemblages that involve people, technology, transport, roads, written messages, bells, and mobile phones. This research identifies the *va* as an intermediary for communication, therefore fitting Slater's (2013) criteria as a communicative assemblage.Rather than being described as a Swiss army knife (Satyanaraynan, 2005) in developed contexts, in Island Breeze, the mobile phone is just one option of many that exists in the village's stabilised and routinized systems

of communication.

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