The Space in-between: An Ethnographic Study of Mobile Technology and Social Change in Rural Samoa

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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March 2017
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed. I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship

Marion Va'iva'Muiaumaseal'i

March 2017
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My soul purpose in pursuing the PhD was to be in a better position to give back to others. My desire to see others achieve their goals and provide solutions to be the best of version of them, has everything to do with my faith and belief in a higher power. My faith in God has given me the courage, strength and humility to do my best and finish well.
DEDICATION

To

The late Leaupepe Laki and Rosalina (nee Sapolu) Muliaumaseali’i

The late Leaupepe Sanerivi Muliaumaseali’i

LLB (Hons), MJur (Auckland University) BCL (Oxford University)

For Lagi, Toto, Malo, Ula, Khing, Pisa, Sila and Laki, who have played a part in being mentors, role models and best friends! Thank you for being the best siblings, always loving and supportive.

For Lavenia, Calvin, Fulumoa, Elias, Fuatino, Hope, and Sani, you are all the next generation of trailblazers. Go forth and make life your own. Love always Aunty Va’i. X

For Michelle -1975-2016 Gone Too Soon
### GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Aiga</em></td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Aitu</em></td>
<td>Demi god</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ali’i</em></td>
<td>Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Atua</em></td>
<td>God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Aualuma</em></td>
<td>Womens Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Aumaga</em></td>
<td>Mens Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fa’aaloalo</em></td>
<td>Respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fa’alavelave</em></td>
<td>A situation that requires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the support of family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fa’olupega</em></td>
<td>Lineage of the Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fa’amatai</em></td>
<td>Traditional Village Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fa’asamo</em></td>
<td>Samoan way of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Faipule</em></td>
<td>Speaking Chief with political importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fale Lalaga</em></td>
<td>Weaving group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fale palagi</em></td>
<td>European style House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fale o’o</em></td>
<td>Traditional Samoan house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Faletua o Sa’o</em></td>
<td>High Chief’s Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fanua</em></td>
<td>Land or Property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fa’asinomaga</em></td>
<td>Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Feagaiga</em></td>
<td>Covenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fia-palagi</em></td>
<td>Want to be westernised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Fono</em></td>
<td>Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I’e Toga</em></td>
<td>Ceremonial Mat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ifoga</em></td>
<td>To bow down in submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Komiti</em></td>
<td>Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Komiti a Tiná</em></td>
<td>Women’s Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Malae</em></td>
<td>Large open space – grass area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Meaalofo</em></td>
<td>Gift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Nu’u</em></td>
<td>Village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VI
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palagi</td>
<td>European Foreigner</td>
<td>Tulafale</td>
<td>Orator or Speaking Chief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pule Nu’u</td>
<td>Village Mayor</td>
<td>Va Fealoaloa’i</td>
<td>Relational Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puletasi</td>
<td>Traditional two piece gown</td>
<td>Va Fa’apouli</td>
<td>The Hidden Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sa’o</td>
<td>High Chief</td>
<td>Va Tapua</td>
<td>Sacred Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salu</td>
<td>Coconut flax broom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upu Fa’aaloalo</td>
<td>Words of Respect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tagaloalelagi</td>
<td>Creator of the heavens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talanoa</td>
<td>To talk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talanoa</td>
<td>Pacific Approach to Research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tautua</td>
<td>Service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teu le Va</td>
<td>Nurture the Space In-between</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION
The Space In-Between: An Ethnographic Study of Mobile Technology and Social Change in Rural Samoa

By MARION VA’IVA’I MULIAUMASEALI’I

The mobile phone has been described as an all-purpose ‘Swiss army knife’ that gives consumers access to a network to check emails, make Skype calls, update social media, pay bills, take photos, and even wake them up in the morning. It has evolved into a “central and cultural technology” with the “power” to reconstruct identities, set trends, and micro-organise lives (Goggin 2006, pg.2-3; Lipset 2013). These features enable consumers to shift their reliance on other people and technologies to achieve everyday tasks onto the mobile phone, making them more self-sufficient. Yet, as mobile phone research around the world has revealed, the particular ways in which mobile phones and smartphones are integrated into the everyday lives of consumers varies depending upon pre-existing cultural and communication practices in the societies in which they live. While many practices surrounding mobile phones transcend the local, research indicates that the relative geographic positioning of mobile phones continues to be a major factor influencing how they are integrated into everyday life. The physical and demographic characteristics of locations e.g. rural, urban, large land mass or remote locations such as a Small Island Developing States (SIDS) interact with the cultural and global properties of mobile phones to shape local practices.

This thesis examines the integration of mobile phones in rural Samoa, an island in the South Pacific that has seen an increase of subscriptions from 2500 (analogue) in 2000 to 91.4 % mobile penetration in 2015 (The World Bank 2013, GSMA intelligence 2016). Drawing upon eight months of ethnographic research in rural Samoa, this thesis analyses whether, and how, the Samoan concept of va is being changed by mobile phone practices. To understand change I utilise the concept of the space in-between as a cultural construct that in Samoa has influenced the strong kinship and cultural bonds in fa’asamo (the Samoan way of life), and the way these values are mediated via the mobile phone through co-presence. I explore negotiations around villagers’ decisions to
access the communicative ecologies that the mobile phone gives rise to and how the va influences the non-use of mobile phones within the village hierarchy. Throughout this thesis I argue that the villages’ rich communicative ecologies and the Samoan concept of va are factors influencing the slow up-take of this device despite an increase in mobile penetration.
I first noticed the differences in how Samoans used communications media or mobile phones in Samoa at the end of my pilot research in 2013. In urban Samoa, where I had just completed fieldwork with an organisation in the main city Apia, I was preparing that morning to visit my family. While having breakfast in one of the hotels in Apia, the capital city, I checked Facebook on my mobile phone. I read a status update from a friend who worked for the Samoan government, it read: “apparently we just got hit by an earthquake? #didntfeellathing.” I couldn’t believe it! I also didn’t feel a thing and neither did anyone in the restaurant. I did my own research on Google and discovered that at 9.00am Samoa was hit by an earthquake that measured 6.7 on the Richter scale. It hit about 157 kilometres south-west of Apia at a depth of 10 kilometres (Talamua 2013). It only lasted a few minutes but it warranted a tsunami watch warning. The taxi driver who was taking me to my family village described his experience when the earthquake had hit. He said it was a violent shake, but very brief. His radio was set to the state station 2AP, which was broadcasting in Samoan about the tsunami warning. The warning was for the low-lying coastal areas, which includes the town area and my grandmother’s village. The schools in the area closed early, traffic was heavy, and tension was evident.

My grandmother was in a wheelchair and had been in New Zealand celebrating her 92nd birthday, returning to Samoa just a few weeks before my arrival. My uncle, who accompanied her back to Samoa, was attending a funeral when the earthquake struck. I didn’t have his cell number and other family members who I could have called were still in New Zealand and returning home later. I was quite panicked. What do I buy? Water and food supplies, how much? Where do we go for the evacuation? How will I get my grandmother to safety with no relatives available with transport? I had a taxi van and I planned to get food, stop to collect my grandmother, and then head to safety in the taxi. The supermarket was full with panicked locals buying water and food. Children released early from school flooded the streets as they prepared to head home to safety. The local radio station, 2AP, continued to
advise people of the warning and to prepare in case there was a need to evacuate. My taxi driver was busy on the taxi radio transmitter and his mobile phone, contacting his regular customers about the change in circumstances. I sent text messages to friends from the organisation I had worked with to see if they had heard about the earthquake and tsunami warning. They had not and immediately jumped on social media to confirm the news. What would have happened if I didn’t have a smartphone? In that very moment the mobile phone became my only reliable connection to family and other sources of information about the tsunami alert. I would send Facebook message to the family once I had more information about grandma and got her to safety. I could already see that many people in New Zealand and other parts of the world were sending comforting messages to Samoa, as news had reached them of the tsunami warning. I was thankful for mobile technology, for the options that it brought to Samoa could not only save lives, but also bring comfort and a sense of connectedness despite the vast ocean that stood between Samoa and many loved ones abroad. Thankfully the warning was cancelled, my grandmother was safe, and her pantry was fully stocked and ready for any future emergencies.

This experience highlighted the ways in which mobile phones were being adopted in Samoa and their importance both in everyday life and in times of crisis. In a moment of danger they became literal lifelines for those who needed relevant information in real time and to connect to the outside world for support and reassurance. The mobile phone made my taxi driver the most important person to his customers as they dealt with the crisis, since within minutes of the warning he was able to reassure them that he would pick up their children, who had been released early from school. However, the mobile phone was by no means the only form of media that Samoans relied upon during the crisis. I noted the informal partnering of the internet, mobile phone, and radio. Those without a smart phone or access to the internet had the radio tuned to the state radio station 2AP, but in my mama’s household all three communication channels were available and complemented each other by providing additional sources of information.
When I arrived at my family home I found my grandmother and aunty sitting at the front door. Their bags were packed and they were listening to the broadcast on a small transistor radio. My aunty carries it with her everywhere. She is in her late fifties and has a basic Nokia mobile phone, which she uses for texting and phone calls. She would only believe that the warning was cancelled once it was announced on the radio. I had read about the cancellation of the warning online but she would not feel safe until 2AP had confirmed it. My grandmother, on the other hand, who was receiving information both from the radio and through me via online sources, would only feel safe once she had heard the news from a trusted source. She wanted to call her sons, who were at the funeral, to confirm that all was well.

This scenario paints a picture of three generations and three different communicative ecologies. My grandmother, at age 92, has seen and experienced many technological changes. She is an avid listener to the radio and viewer of TV news. She does not own a mobile phone and relies on traditional face-to-face methods of communication. Things are not okay in her mind until she has assurance from a close family member. In comparison, my aunty clings to the familiarity of the radio announcers on 2AP. Just like my grandmother, my aunty believes in the integrity of the information based on the sender, but in her case she is willing to place her trust in the authority of radio announcers. While she listens to another station for entertainment, 2AP it is for “important” announcements.

In contrast, I represent a generation that prefers to receive information in real time and through reliable sources on the web. I find that by the time “breaking news” has hit the radio or TV, it has already been circulated through online platforms. I also utilise all forms of media that are available (e.g., Internet, radio, and contacts) and check if they are all saying the same thing. In this scenario, I was listening to the Samoan broadcasts in case they contradicted my online findings.
This experience sparked my interest in the relationship of mobile phones and *fa’asamoa* (Samoan way of life) and led to narrowing down my topic from the impact of Information Communication Technologies (hereafter ICTs) on Samoan culture to the relationship between mobile phones and *fa’asamoa*, particularly the Samoan concept of *va* (the space in-between). This cultural construct is described as a code of conduct amongst Samoans that exhibits the tenants of respect and harmony (Anae 2010, Lui 2003, Wendt 1996). *Fa’asamoa* values family relations and cultural protocols (Wendt 1996); during most family or cultural meetings the uses of mobile phones (or any ICTs) are forbidden. This thesis explores the tension the mobile creates in relation to the *va* in rural Samoa where the village hierarchy and rules support the use of traditional means of communication.
1.0 Introduction

Since its introduction to world markets in the 1990s, the mobile phone has become such a global phenomenon that when I ended my research in 2015 there were 7 billion mobile phones globally (ITU 2015, Goggin et al. 2014). There is still much to learn in this under-theorised field, particularly in the second generation adoption of mobile phones in countries outside the global North (Ling and Horst 2011). The mobile phone is incorporated into everyday life varies widely across geographic and social space (Donner 2008, Horst and Miller 2006, Ling and Horst 2011, Lipset 2013). Postill (2013) suggests that one way to approach the monolithic feat of understanding mobile phones and sociocultural change is to track actual mobile-related changes from the 1990s to the present. This thesis takes such an empirical approach, using ethnography to illustrate the sociocultural changes in Samoan villages since the entry of the mobile phone to the Samoan market in 2006.

From her first contact with foreigners through to the period of colonisation; Samoa has fascinated her interlopers with her sense of pride, hospitality and self-governance (Davidson 1967). She was a German territory from 1899-1914 and was occupied and administered by New Zealand under the trusteeship of the United Nations in 1946. On the 1st of January 1962 Samoa became the first of the Pacific Islands to become an independent sovereign state and in 1997 the Constitution was amended to rename Western Samoa as Samoa (Davidson 1967, Te’o and Fairburn 1993, Pacmas 2013). Samoa comprises of two large islands, Upolu and Savai’i and a number of smaller adjacent islands. The country has a total land area of 2,930 km2, with a population of around 196,628 of whom two-thirds reside on the main island of Upolu (Tacchi et al. 2013).

The arrival of mobile technology in Samoa instigated a major expansion of communications infrastructure, thereby facilitating mobile phone uptake by the general population. In 1997, Telecom Samoa Cellular Services Limited (TSCL) formed a joint partnership with Telecom NZ (90% shareholding) and the Samoan government (10% shareholding). By the year 2000, the analogue cellular service had 2500 subscriptions; however, these were
exclusively in the Samoan capital city, Apia. A World Bank grant of USD$3.25 million to implement Samoa’s Telecommunication Reform Project contributed to the Samoan government’s shift from ownership and operations to policy and regulation (Meese & Chan Mow 2016) which saw the privatisation of telecommunications in Samoa. In 2005 the Telecommunications Act was established, allowing private competition to enter the market. Samoa’s first GSM (Global System for Mobile) licence was sold to Digicel in April 2006. By October 2006, the Irish-owned, Caribbean-based mobile provider had acquired 90% of the Telecom NZ share of TCSL (who had the second GSM licence) which required 39 mobile phone towers to be installed by Telecom NZ. Digicel was also granted further funding by the World Bank to roll out their cellular network, and in November 2006 they launched a GSM network that increased coverage to 90% of the country (Meese & Chan Mow 2016, MCIT, 2006, Russell, 2013). In January 2007, the government-owned SamoaTel entered the GSM market, launching a network that increased the number of mobile phone subscribers to 70,000. However, in 2008 mobile phone subscriptions plateaued and the company was unable to compete with Digicel’s aggressive marketing strategy. SamoaTel was sold to the American Samoa-based mobile provider, Bluesky Corporation, which continues its service to the Samoan public (Russell, 2013). 3G is available with mobile coverage nationwide, and although 4G services are offered there are debates as to whether the population can fully access 4G speeds. As a result of these developments in infrastructure, market conditions, and government regulations, mobile phone penetration increased rapidly in both urban and rural Samoa.

The total population subscriptions (fixed and mobile) climbed from 12,500 in 2002 to 152,800 by 2008 and 168,000 by 2010 (Meese & Chan Mow 2016). The Samoan government’s Internet subscription targets were met in 2010 when the number of subscribers increased from 3,000 in 2002 to an estimated 12,000. The 2010 target for an increase in the number of telecommunications customers in rural areas was 7,000. The actual number reported of customers in rural areas that year was an estimated 57,943 (The World Bank 2013) and can be attributed to an aggressive marketing strategy that saw the cost of mobile phones drop as low as $9.00 SAT (Intvw 01 personal communication 2015). A Pacific Media Assistance Scheme report on Samoa found that, of the estimated population
of 196,628, mobile penetration is exceptionally high at 91.4 per cent (Tacchi et al. 2013). However, despite Samoa being one of the most mature mobile markets of the Pacific in 2014 only 28% owned smartphones; instead, voice and texting remain the dominant practices (Meese & Chan Mow, 2016. Pg.305). Moreover, as my thesis will demonstrate, mobile phone ownership does not necessarily translate into extensive mobile phone usage. In rural areas, residents continue to rely on pre-existing modes of communication, including face-to-face conversation, ringing bells, and blowing conch shells, rather than using the mobile phone. Why is it the case? Inadequate infrastructure, the expense of mobile phone usage, and unfamiliarity are all possible reasons why rural Samoans do not use mobile phones extensively. In this thesis, however, I argue that the socio-cultural features of rural Samoan life limit the spaces in which mobile phone usage is advantageous or appropriate.

Anthropologists have been conducting research in Samoa for nearly a hundred years (Mead 1961, Goldman 1970) and their findings suggest that the cultural and geographic particularities of Samoan life would influence both how the mobile phone is incorporated into pre-existing practices, and its potential to instigate change in Samoa (Chanmow 2014, Meese & Chan Mow 2016, Russell 2013). Yet there has been little research into the impact of the mobile phone in the Samoan context. Chanmow’s (2014) paper on strategies for Information Communication Technologies in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) acknowledges the lack of research on mobile phones in Samoa. Her research with Meese (2016) investigates the reform of telecommunications in Samoa over the last decade and describes the emergence of a Samoan digital culture. Other findings complement the themes of this thesis of hierarchy and control stating that the affordances of the mobile phone challenge the Samoan way of life- fa’asamoa. Russell’s (2013) Master’s thesis on mobile phones in a rural village provides a snapshot of how the mobile phone shapes daily life in two Samoan villages. Russell (2013) states the qualitative methods of interviewing and observation doesn’t qualify her research as ethnographic; because the short time (4 weeks) spent in the field was further limited by illness. She describes her research as exploratory and scoping. This exploratory fieldwork touches on the Samoan concept of va as a phenomenon that requires further analysis in mobile-related
scholarship. Russell discusses her discovery of va in a chapter that explored the everyday meaning of personal
relationships and how the mobile phone fits into these connections. The limitations on time did not allow her to do
any in-depth observations but she became aware of the va before she could define it.

“I was intrinsically aware of an unseen and unspoken sense of being. I felt it particularly
when in the village, between family members, children playing, neighbours and when in
church. Language for me was a barrier and so I was unable to clearly articulate to my Samoan
acquaintances this existential element of being Samoan. It is ever present and yet unseen.
Troubled by my inability to assign a word to this fundamental element of being Samoan, it
wasn’t until I returned to New Zealand and conversed with a long-time friend studying social
psychology, that she highlighted the possibility of this element being Va.”

Russell 2013 pg.35

This thesis leads with the concept of va and concurs with Russell’s (2013) observation that the va is part of being
Samoan. As the first thesis to explore the Samoan concept of va within the mobile phone scholarship, it examines
the tangible and intangible properties of va in shaping mobile phone usage. The deliberate use of this lens as a
framework of inquiry extends current knowledge on Pacific epistemologies to the mobile technology literature. It
dissects va as a traditional cultural perspective that is relevant to the field of mobile communication and provides a
platform to creating effective tools for practice, policy and research around Pacific and Polynesian mobile habits.
To understand these emergent practices, I begin by briefly introducing the tangible and intangible lenses of va and
the parallels between the principles of va and the properties of the mobile phone, especially place (tangible) and
co-presence (intangible). I then discuss relevant literature on mobile phones, especially in relation to social
change, space and place, and gender and power. After this literature review I return to the Pacific context,
providing background information and a thicker description of the concepts of va and fa’amatai (indigenous rule).
Finally, I examine some definitional issues and provide an outline of the thesis.
1.1 Research Questions

As the first ethnographic study of mobile phones in Samoa, this thesis builds upon research into mobile phones and social change in other developing countries to bring context to the Samoan case. It does this by examining how the use of mobile phones in a Samoan rural village (which I have called Island Breeze) is governed by the fa’amatai system (indigenous rule). Situated within a broader understanding of the ways in which communication—especially the concept of va—operates in the fa’amatai system, it examines if and how the use of mobile phones by village-dwelling Samoans is influencing the fa’amatai system.

The main research question (RQ1) asks, is the va (space in-between) being influenced and changed by mobile practises in rural Samoa? The Samoan concept of va (gap or space) is central to all aspects of fa’asamoa (the Samoan way of life). It plays a role in defining and enacting all relationships, and is so ingrained in everyday practices that it is considered to be intuitive. When Samoans talk about the va, they refer to relationships that are both tangible and intangible. The va is the unspoken rule that governs all relations and relationships within fa’asamoa. By bringing together the Samoan concept of va (the space in-between) in both its tangible and intangible guises with key concepts in the mobile phone literature, I examine how indigenous knowledge systems shape the uptake and use of devices such as mobile phones. This study’s focus on place mobility allows this study to investigate of my the next line on enquiry (RQ1a): how does the mobile phone fit into the communicative ecologies of a Samoan rural village and how does fa’amatai influence place mobility? And the final research question is (RQ1b): how does co-presence influence the relational space (va fealoaloa’i), sacred space (va tapua), and the ideology of feagaiga (covenant) between a Samoan male and female?

1.2 The Tangible Lens of Analysis

The tangible lens of va as used in this thesis is primarily concerned with the behaviour of my participants from Island Breeze around mobile phone use within the boundaries and rules of village life. It explores mobile phone practises within the communicative ecologies of a traditional rural village rather than statistics of content on...
mobile phones such as indicated in other research in other Pacific and small islands (Peseckas, 2014). In doing so there is a focus on the village structure, communicative ecologies and the va as variables to the everyday practice of mobile phone use. As I will describe in more detail later, it illustrates things like how respect for others is shown through actions, what one wears, how one carries oneself, how one serves others, and where and when mobile phones are used or not used in certain village settings. It is through this first lens that empirical evidence from this research has found the mobile phones’ ability to inflect place is inhibited by the village structure.

A benefit of having mobile communications is the capability of having a conversation anywhere and at any time. Although not everyone owns a mobile phone, through communal living, which is explored in chapter three, every household has access to using one. This research explores mobile phone use in an environment that inhibits its use in certain village spaces. It questions how ‘useful’ this device is, if the mobility function of the device is hampered by village rules and communication. This study shows how the fa’amatai (indigenous rule) structure of a Samoan village limits the place mobility of the mobile phone, thereby impeding the novelty of being contactable anywhere and anytime. A major component of this finding is how the communicative ecologies within the fa’amatai system are the reason for the slow uptake of mobile usage in rural Samoa. The traditional means of communication that enrich the communicative ecologies of my research site, Island Breeze, and the Samoan concept of va, are factors in the slow up-take of the ubiquitous device.

1.2.1 The Intangible Lens of Va

The second lens of analysis is the intangible lens of va, in which the va is regarded as a relational arrangement that accommodates all things living and dead (Tui Atua 2009). This brings context to the final set of research questions (RQ1b): how does co-presence influence the relational space (va fealoaloa’i), sacred space (va tapuia), and the ideology of feagaiga (covenant) between a Samoan male and female? Bringing together a conceptual va model that emerged from my fieldwork, I analyse how mediated spaces of co-presence and social presence conflict with the covenant between a Samoan male and female (feagaiga), the va fealoaloa’i (relational space), where all
familial relationships are built on respect and trust and why the sacred space (va tapuia) can accommodate the mobile phone as part of its myths and legends. Through the intangible lens of va, I argue that the anonymity and easy accessibility that mobile phone communication brings to individuals changed the life circumstances for youth by extending an agency to them that they typically do not possess until much later in life. This is a major social shift that has created conflict within families and become a conduit for the start of inappropriate relations. It is through mediated or hidden spaces that the mobile phone has the strongest influence on va, and evidence from this research indicates that the cyclic nature of va brings restoration to any breach between the village, family, and individuals.

1.3 Understanding Mobile Communication and Change

From the telegraph and phone booth to the household landline and the mobile phones (Ling 2004, Ling and Donner 2009), the rapid spread of mobile phones in the global south has captured the imagination of technophiles, development agencies, corporations, and governments due to its potential to ‘leapfrog’ the digital divide and provide solutions towards economic development and social change. Within the global south, research over the last decade focused upon documenting and understanding the ways in which mobile phones may be changing methods and meanings of communication (Donner 2008, Horst and Miller 2006, Ling and Horst 2011, Lipset 2013). Ling and Horst (2011) reflect on the changes instituted by the landline, drawing parallels between the transition to landlines and the use of mobiles in the global south. As they argue, there is an opportunity here to comprehend “the dynamics of adoption and appropriation and the consequences of these practices locally and globally” (Ling & Horst 2011 pg. 364).

The mobile phone extends the possibilities created by landlines, especially for rural communities in China, Africa, and India where the landline has had limited reach. It opens up a myriad of opportunities through creating greater connectivity (Burrell 2010, Doron and Jeffrey 2013, Ling and Campbell 2011, Wallis 2013). De Bruijn (2009) describes how the introduction of the mobile phone brought new avenues of employment and self-employment to
rural Cameroonians in Buea. Poor infrastructure meant that landlines were only made available in the early 1990s and were limited to being “tools for the rich and beyond the reach of ordinary Cameroonians” (De Bruijin, 2009, pg 66). The twenty-first century has seen the growth and subsequent ubiquity of the mobile phone and access for “ordinary Cameroonians” (De Bruijin, 2009, pg 66), leading to employment opportunities through call boxes. Call boxes are wooden structures, 60cm x 60cm x 190cm high, with four makeshift ‘windows’ cut out of the top half so that you only see the top half of the shopkeeper. They operate like pay phones, only using mobile phones, where locals can purchase airtime and make calls at a cheaper rate. These call boxes have changed the communication and social landscape of Buea and have made the mobile phone a staple in their communicative ecologies.

In a similarly innovative fashion, African countries surrounding Lake Victoria have adapted the text message facility as a weather warning device equipped with a colour coded alert system for the illiterate (Srinivasan and Burrell, 2015). In other contexts, the introduction of the prepaid Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) card has been seminal to the adoption of mobile phones in the global south. Prepaid mobile phones meant that people were not tied to an expensive plan with fixed costs; rather, the “pay as you go” nature of the prepaid phone gave consumers freedom and more control over their telephone spending. The appeal to developing communities was the vouchers allowed users to “top up” their phone credit according to a shifting budget (Horst and Miller 2006, pg 20-22). The SIM card has not only given users a cheaper option, but has also meant they no longer had to make the arduous trek to the public phone and stand in a queue, only to have their conversation overheard by others in the line. As mobile coverage spread to different cultures, social classes, and developing countries, it gave ordinary people access to new and creative avenues for communication (Horst and Miller 2006, pg 20-22). Developing nations that do not have the infrastructure to provide an adequate landline service have found the mobile phone to be an effective substitute (Ling and Donner, 2009). These cases of substitution of the mobile for the landline suggest that mobile use is not primarily for entertainment or social activities; rather users are also motivated by more pragmatic concerns. In India, for example, a young man who has SIM card may borrow a phone to check local market prices
for the best return on crops, or to contact relatives who have had to live abroad in order to send money home (Doron and Jeffrey 2013). This is just one of many ways in which mobile phones are used to access information that can be incorporated into livelihood strategies. Recent studies in the area of Information and Communication Technologies for Development (hereafter ICTD), however, suggest that ICTs are not simply used for instrumental or serious purposes. Tully and Eckdale argue that play is just as important to development as the socio-economic, education and health related issue (Tully and Ekdale 2014). An emergent area of research calls for the “reframing of ICTD discourse that acknowledges playful uses of technology as essential for personal development and adaptation to social and technological change” (Sey and Ortoleva, 2014.pg. 1). Ethnographic research has revealed a mix of both instrumental and economically-motivated uses as well as for communication and entertainment (Doron and Jeffrey 2013, Horst and Miller 2006, Wallis 2013). The mobile phone is utilised by different cultures in ways that are relevant to their social, cultural, and economic environment. New meanings are created, from the sound of a ring tone to the meaning behind a missed call other than the receiver not answering in time (Lipset 2013, Horst and Miller 2006). Ling and Donner (2009), for example, describe a case in which a restaurant owner in Rwanda receives one ring tone and then missed call from a customer, which signifies the question “is there any food left?” The owner calls back with two ring tones before hanging up, which signifies “come on down.” The fact that neither participant answered the phone means the interaction is free (Ling and Donner 2009, pg50-57). These examples of mobile phone appropriation in other developing nations show the tangible aspects of the mobile phone usage in other contexts. These cases contrast with the ways that the mobile phone is used in rural Samoa. As I will investigate through the tangible lens of va, the device fits into the communicative ecologies of Island Breeze in unique ways.

1.4 Mobile Communication and the Reformulation of Space and Place

The transition of telephone communication from a fixed landline to a device to be carried on an individual person has changed the way societies communicate, coordinate, and share information. In different places in the world,
the domestication of the mobile phone has seen a reconfiguration of public and private spaces and inverted the flow of bringing the public into the private, as television and radio had done previously (Silverstone 1994, Hjorth, 2008). Castells et al.(2007) argue that the mobile phone transcends time and space and has redefined the meaning of public space, causing conversations usually held in private to now occur in open public spaces (Ling and Campbell 2011). This transition is also described as individual addressability (Ling 2004, Goggin et al. 2014) where the mobile phone gives direct access to a person unlike a landline where a call was made to a fixed abode. This shift has changed family, organisational, and societal dynamics, since households and businesses can now be organised remotely via the mobile phone. Developed societies have had to move from the idea of time and time-keeping as fixed and set to what Ling terms the “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 without them. This micro-coordination (Ling 2004, Goggin et al. 2014) enables families to synchronise their schedules no matter where they are, enabling users to “recast settings” (and)”make up the rules” (Ling 2004, pg.22) as they go about transitioning from using a fixed landline to a device located on their own person, as well as having the freedom to use mobile phones on buses, trains, and in public spaces.

In developed countries such as the United States of America, the device is commonly known as a mobile phone and is defined by technical infrastructure, whereas in the United Kingdom its untethering from a fixed location gives it the term used in this thesis, “mobile phone” (Ito et al. 2005). In Japan, the mobile phone is called keitai, meaning “something you carry with you,” but unlike in the USA and UK it is not defined by technical dimensions or unhampered activity. Rather, it concerns “a snug and intimate technosocial tethering, a personal device supporting communications that are a constant, lightweight, and mundane presence in everyday life” (Ito et al 2005, pg.1). Another example of this is how the mobile phone has altered the coordination of everyday life. According to Ito et al. (2005), Japanese youth believe that a person who arrives at an agreed destination late isn’t really ‘late’ if they have been communicating with the other parties in the virtual space; in other words “Presence in the virtual space is considered an acceptable form of initial showing up for an appointed gathering time” (Ito et al. 2005.pg 268). The
different descriptions or definitions of the device indicate cultural meanings in differing discrete contexts and the differing varying implications of the adoption of this technology into the everyday. While this section looks at the mobile phone’s meanings in industrialised contexts, it also draws attention to the themes of location, place, and space. Another feature of co-presence is that it allows consumers to conduct numerous conversations simultaneously. This was found in Tjora’s (2011) study with youth in Norway who prefer the Short Messaging Service (SMS) of the mobile phone as a means of communication. Extending Ito et al’s (2005) “presence in the virtual space” (pg. 268), Tjora studies the interactions of her participants using SMS while in the same physical space, and coined the term “shared physical space” (SPS) or SPS-SMS (Tjora 2011 pg.194). The “semi-synchronous communication” of face-to-face communication while simultaneously communicating via SMS, is described as “communicative transparency layers” (Tjora 2011 pg.194).

Tjora associates these with Gergen’s (2002) “inside space” versus “outside space” (pg 238) and Goffman’s (1959) “front stage” and “backstage,” which Gergen describes as a notion of another layer or space of interactivity mediated through the mobile phone (Goffman, 1959. pg 16). This kind of presence is also described as place (Lee, 2004, Miller and Sinanan, 2014, Bulu, 2012). In chapter 6 I explore other dimensions of presence (social and co-presence), analysing the influence of mediated presence via the mobile phone on the va in Island Breeze.

Although Japan is known for its technological advances, consumers still needed to become accustomed to the ways that keitai was changing the relationship between public and private spaces. In the early adoption years of the 1990s, the use of keitai in public spaces was frowned upon and led to public announcements on trains for all keitai users to refrain from using the device while in their seats. The Japanese train culture is such that despite subways and carriages being at full capacity, it is “remarkably quiet” (Ito et al, 2005.pg 206). The early keitai adoption phase saw frequent public announcements cautioning keitai use within trains, but since the high uptake of youth and use in public, the Japanese public transportation authorities were inclined to create “Keitai manners” (Ito et al, 2005.pg 206). Today, keitai manners are not as controversial a topic as before, but rather have become a social norm.

Keitais are permitted on trains so long as they are in silent mode. Email and texting is acceptable, but no voice calls
are to be taken. This negotiation of *keitai* etiquette on trains lasted over a decade between public transport
organisations and various social actors. Participating parties included adults in positions of power and the
dominant social actors in this space, youth, illustrating the impetus of the mobile phone towards socio-cultural
change and the significance of location and place in relation to mobile phone usage.
These studies demonstrate the mobile phone’s potential to redefine social interaction and inflect the meanings of
space and place. It is a symbol of convergent mobile media marked by divergent mobile practises that reflects how
the local informs the global (Hjorth 2008) and is evident in developing contexts as much as in developed ones. Its
fundamental feature is that it transcends geographical boundaries and enables the shift from calling a fixed
location to calling the individual in any location. The wireless aspect of the mobile phone has provided
telecommunications access to people living in developing contexts with poor infrastructure, especially in remote
areas. This has led to it being labelled as technology that leapfrogs the digital divide (Donner, 2008). The next
section examines how this shift has changed the everyday life of mobile users, particularly in developing nations.

1.5 Power, Gender, and the Mobile Phone

The individual addressability of the mobile phone has opened up a myriad of opportunities for social change. Horst
and Miller (2006), for example, identified the landline as allowing Jamaican women control over the use of phones
due to its one central location. In contrast, the mobile phone enables individual ownership and control over calls,
which disrupted power dynamics in the family. The focus here is power dynamics and the transition of authority
from the collective to the individual. Horst and Miller (2006) found that one of the most common forms of
networking is geared towards the formation and expansion of relationships, practical transactions such as
remittances to cover medical and other household bills, and the potential for sexual relations (pg93). The mobile
phone is used to facilitate secret liaisons, which led to its portrayal as a tool of betrayal. On the other hand, it is
also used as a tool to bridge relationships, such as with estranged fathers, and to spread of gossip in ‘real time.’ Its
uses are therefore multifaceted. Women in patriarchal societies have also gained access to mobile phones where
prior access to telecommunications was forbidden. Burrell (2010) discusses the inequality of shared access agreements between men and women in rural Uganda. She describes the constraints placed on access; for example, women who do not own a phone are given access to their husband’s phone when they need to use it. Some women reported that they are excluded from dialling or texting, as this function is performed by the husband. Others were not permitted to take or make phone calls in private. Burrell’s research found that “women held little control over the mobile phone” (Burrell 2010, pg236).

The influence of the mobile phone on gendered relations also extends outside male and female relations. Wallis’s (2013) ethnography among female migrants in China indicates a shift in how Chinese women connect with the world. Wallis carried out a study with female service workers that had moved to the ‘big city,’ describing the role played by the mobile phone in their transition from rural to urban life. In a non-digitised society there tends to be what Wallis calls “necessary convergence” (ibid.pg 107), in which there is reliance on one single technology for digital use, as opposed to ‘selective convergence’ in affluent societies with access to more than one digital device (e.g., laptops, smartphones, digital cameras, etc.) In the case of Wallis’s research, the mobile phone was a site of necessary convergence. For many of her participants, the only access they had to the internet outside of an internet café was via an internet-enabled mobile phone.

In developing countries where people are forced to travel to a different country or city for employment and other opportunities, the mobile phone permits the traveller to access their families. Mothers working abroad have been able to offer remote parenting via the mobile phone, calling fortnightly to check on their children; fathers are able to connect with their sons, and view the mobile phone as way to bond and pass on instructions and fatherly advice (Tacchi, Kitner and Crawford 2012; Doron and Jeffrey 2013); It has significantly influenced the coordination of long distance relationships, often enhancing kinship and intimate relations (Ling and Campbell 2008).

Wallis’ research participants acquired a mobile phone as means of keeping in contact with their families while in the city, as well as to be accessible no matter where they were. Some migrants use the mobile phone in a way that
causes the ‘mobile’ function to be redundant: their long working hours cause them to use the phone almost exclusively in one place, creating what Wallis terms “immobile mobility” (Wallis 2013, pg. 6, 98-99). Although they are immobilised by their duty to work, they are still able to communicate with friends and relatives to coordinate activities, thus overcoming the temporal and structural constraints, and effectively transcending time and space. The transition for these migrant workers is described by the migrants as a form of “developing self” that differentiates them from people (and their former selves) in their rural homes, which they class as “not developed and very poor” (ibid. p64). The process of “developing self” entails the usual discourse found in literature about living in the city, gaining higher education to get a ‘better’ job or getting any job outside of agriculture, participating as a consumer buying fashion and beauty products, and enjoying the city sights and entertainment. The mobile phone acts as a signifier and fashion statement much like in wealthier nations; however, in a country where class systems and traditional roles are still practised, the mobile phone also plays facilitates social change, including changing attitudes towards women and providing them with the agency to be independent from traditional expectations and roles (Wallis 2013). These examples help to contextualize my investigation into the influence of mobile practises on the gendered order role of Island Breeze. In the indigenous rule of fa’amatai, how does mobile phone usage amongst women in the village compare and contrast to research in China, Africa, and Jamaica? (Wallis 2013, Burrell 2010, Horst and Miller 2006)

1.6 Mobile Communication in the Pacific

This section looks at mobile phone appropriation in the Pacific where the themes of indigenous communication (Watson, 2011, 2012, Watson and Duffield, 2016), remote location (Peseckas, 2014), moral panics (Andersen, 2013, Lipset, 2013, Roman, 2006), gender roles, and gendered mobility (Taylor, 2015, Kraemer, 2015) dominate. In her overview of the digital Pacific, Danielle Cave (2012) argues that the Pacific region is experiencing an Information Communication Technology (ICT) revolution that has implications for democratic government and the region’s development. With 60% of the Pacific having access to a mobile phone and the Internet, the potential to harness,
promote, and influence political and social change is immense (ibid. pg1). Mobile penetration in Papua New Guinea (PNG) has increased from 2% in 2006 to 34% in 2011. Other Pacific islands, such as Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu, and New Caledonia enjoy mobile penetration rates of over 80%. The remote location of some Pacific islands has been a barrier to the development of infrastructure that warrants a consistent flow of electricity and telephone communication (Cave, 2012, Peseckas, 2014, Watson, 2012). Many residents of remote Pacific regions still rely on indigenous means of communication. Watson and Duffield’s (2016) comparative analysis of literature on the traditional means of communication in a remote village in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and the mobile phone took place at the early adoption stage of mobile technology. Watson mapped the communicative ecologies of Orora, a remote village that used wooden slit drums called garamuts to send messages across the district, and found that the drums were still used daily to communicate. Some liken the garamut’s specific beats to the five clans within the village, remarking that the practice is “the mobile belonging to Papua New Guinea” (Watson and Duffield, 2016. pg 7), since the drum beat specific to a clan acts as their own garamut signal or mobile phone number. Locals’ responses and attitudes towards the mobile phone were mostly positive; with the ability to have personal conversations with loved ones across long distances favoured the most. Negative responses largely concern costs, the use of mobile phones to plan illegal acts like roadside hold-ups, and the belief that the mobile phone resulted in more adultery and sexual promiscuity. Immoral micro-coordination (Lipset, 2013) is not new to the mobile phone literature and in the Pacific this behaviour has different colloquial terminologies, such as “phone friends” (Andersen, 2013), “pull a girl,” or “serava” (Taylor, 2015).

Lipset’s (2013) research in peri-urban PNG raises interesting conclusions regarding how the mobile phone organises daily life. He asserts that mobile technology creates a “moral ambivalence about their impact on society” (ibid. pg 349) and provides examples of moral and immoral micro-coordination that he observed during his time in the village, Murik. Moral micro-coordination is described as organising family, work colleagues, and choir members to meet or to not meet. Grandfathers call their grandchildren to ensure they arrived home safely. The immoral micro-
coordination discovered in Murik displays nuances that are different from the case studies from Jamaica and my findings in Samoa. The potential for illicit sexual liaisons in small communities (or anywhere, for that matter) predates technology and the arrival of the mobile phone. In Murik, people are aware of the potential the mobile phone provides for these liaisons to occur more frequently and under the “radar,” as explained in a candid conversation with a participant:

‘Before, men and women [in villages] used third parties to carry messages to arrange to meet [a lover]. It was very easy to find out [what was going on]. Now old men, married men, young men, students are all spoiled. They all have access. They commit adultery by mobile’

(Lipset, 2013 p435)

Lipset attributes the immoral forms of micro-coordination to ego-centred networks; however, he emphasises that this is nothing like Castell’s (1996) networked society (Horst and Miller 2006). The Murik people view mobile phones as the reason for marriage break-ups, even to the point of “charging the mobile phone with abetting infidelity” (Lipset, 2013, pg345). Similarly, Andersen’s (2013) study of female sociality and physical mobility mediated through the mobile phone in PNG highlights the moral panic caused by mobile phones. This study uses local stories of “phone friends” whereby long term relationships are initiated by calls from random strangers. Andersen argues that phone friend stories resemble the giaman folktales known as fake or trickster tales in the PNG community, and perpetuate the issue of maintaining morally appropriate exchanges through a medium that enables identities to be hidden or disguised. These phone friend stories describe spatiotemporal relations using traditional folktales incorporating sorcery and trickery (giaman), which is spread as gossip or a moral tale of warning. Taylor’s (2015) ethnography in Vanuatu provides examples of how the mobile phone facilitates gendered mobility in the context of masculinity and gender relations in a rural village on Pentecost Island. Advertisements in Vanuatu position the mobile phone as a tool that easily facilitates conversations enabling the creating and building of personal and organisational networks and a new modern lifestyle portraying gender-based equality. However, the embedded gender-based values and stereotypes of the Vanuatu culture oppose this notion of a mobile-
initiated modernity, and this is evident in regards to how mobile phones are used to communicate. Ni-Vanuatu culture is distinguished by a gendered social order. Women fulfil the roles of the domesticated wife and the men do physical labour on the plantation. This social arrangement of a gendered division into ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres (like in previous contexts) became blurred with the quick uptake and spread of the mobile phone and caused a ‘moral panic’ regarding inappropriate relations, which within this hegemonic masculine society placed women at a disadvantage. The discourse around male mobile talk espouses dominated ideals of gendered agency which point towards limiting the agency of women through “physical, social, moral retribution and even the harnessing of scared power such as in the form of cursing” (Taylor, 2015. pg 2)

In contrast, Kraemer’s (2015) work with Vanuatu urban youth in Port Vila indicates a different narrative, implicating the mobile phone’s role in the ‘refashioning’ of female gender roles in urban Vanuatu and distinguishing the significance of place and location in relation to mobile phone practises. Older generations of Ni-Vanuatu who live in urban areas still refer to themselves as people from “home-island place” (Kraemer 2015. pg. 4) which (as found in village Samoa) locates a person geographically and within an inherited kinship network, cultural restrictions, and traditions of morality where, as demonstrated on Pentecost Island, sociality is structured in specific ways. Residents of urban Vanuatu experience themselves as detached from Vanuatu’s kinship systems as the lack of cultural practice and loss of traditional language inhibits the flow of cultural knowledge and resources, thereby weakening their kinship and traditional ties. The blur between the old traditions and ‘new’ rules has caused a “confusion zone” (Kraemer 2015. pg 4) indicating the social structures that guided previous generations are no longer upheld, leaving youth to define their own sociality and evade traditional kinship roles. Women are defining their sociality through secret relationships mediated by the mobile phone. Where the males are allowed to go out at night, females are restricted to the front yard but the mobile phone now allows secret liaisons to occur undetected by adults. The entry of the mobile phone in the “confusion zone” has caused urban youth to “make up
the rules as they go” (Ling 2004), and as a result there has been an increase in pre-marital sex, relationships with unsanctioned partners, and secret relationships (Kraemer, 2015).

1.7 Cultural Dimensions of Change in Samoa

1.7.1 Va, an Indigenous Concept of Space

It has been argued that the study of Pacific cultures by non-Pacific academics has been carried out via a foreign (Mahina.O, 2010) or Euro/American-focused lens (Lilomaia-doktor, 2008). One of the objectives of this thesis is to extend indigenous knowledge and worldviews in relation to mobile phone usage. This is achieved by situating the concept of va in relation to the mobile media and communication literature on developing contexts, with an emphasis on rural areas. In the lead-up to the millennium, the va had not been researched extensively (Kaili, 2005), but in the first decade and a half of the new millennium the study of va extends beyond anthropology and culture studies (Airini et al. 2010) to literature on mental health (Tamasese et al. 2005), the arts (Mila-Schaaf, 2006), politics (Halapua, 2003), education, (Anae, 2010, Airini et al. 2010, Suaalii Sauni and Fulu Aiolupotea, 2014, Vaioleti, 2006), health (Tui Atua, 2009, Tamasese et al. 2005 pg 3), and architecture (Refiti, 2013) among others.

The space in-between is a shared concept amongst most Pacific culture. It is known as va in Tonga (va’ha), Tahiti and Rotuma, while in Aotearoa New Zealand, Hawai’i, and Japan it is known as wa. The commonality of va within these Pacific cultures is that va is sociospatial and connects through genealogy, land, and values (Kaili 2005, Lilomaia-Doktor 2008). Tongan anthropologist Okusitina Mahina (2010) describes it as being four dimensional, encompassing the physical, social, symbolic, and intellectual dimensions. The embeddedness of va impacts Pacific people and their decisions in everyday life. Pacific author and academic Albert Wendt states that va is 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, the space that is context, giving meaning to things (Wendt,1996). The next section looks at the origins of va in a Samoan context.
1.8 In the Beginning Was the *Va*

The Samoan concept of *va* is believed to have been around since the creation of the heavens (Tui Atua 2009). The *va* is spiritual, spatial, and harmonious, and in essence it is a relational space that Samoans are taught to respect. The first environment where a Samoan will learn about the *va* is in the home, within the *aiga* (family).

Central to *fa’asamoana*, the *aiga* is a place of nurturing of language, customs, and values. Fundamental to the success of unity of the *aiga* is the *va*, a concept that governs relationships and the way in which one relates to the other. The *va* is demonstrated rather than taught (Maiava, 2001) through actions and words. It feels ‘innate,’ as Samoans that I grew up with and those whom I observed on a daily basis seemed to carry this ‘awareness’ (Tiatia, 2012) with them. Lui explains of the *va*, “Family is made up of individuals. These individuals are held together by relationships (*va*). Every relationship is sacred (*tapu* or *sa*) and is sealed by” *feagaiga*” (covenant) (Lui, 2003, pg. 3).

The *feagaiga* is always present in the context of *va* and is an ideal that Samoans try and live out in all interactions they have with one another, particularly with respect to how men and women should relate to one another. Pre-Christianity, Samoan women were at the highest place in society, with myths and legends of ancient Samoa depicting women as powerful goddesses embodying beauty, power, and wisdom (Schoeffel, 1987). The sister’s role is one of honour and “the holders and transmitters of sacred power and the men are the holders of secular power and authority” (Fairburn-Dunlop 1991, p72 as cited by Stewart-Withers 2012, p 174). To honour the *feagaiga* means to honour the agreement, contract, or covenant. It has been described by scholars (Davidson 1967, Gershon 2012, Meleisea 1992, Stewart-Withers 2012) as the balance of relationship between a brother and a sister, best defined by the Samoan proverb “*o le teine o le ‘i’oimata o lona tuagane*” (Meleisea 1992, pg. 14) meaning that a sister is likened to the most vulnerable part of the eye. In practical terms this means that a brother serves his sister and will protect her and make sure she is safe and provided for.
1.8.1 The Principles of Va

The following key elements centred on maintaining good relations are described in this thesis as the principles of va. The relational space (va fealoaloa’i), the sacred space (va tapuia), and nurturing the space in-between (teu le va) are the three principles my participants described as areas of tension when discussing their own mobile practises and those of others in the village. The purpose of this section is to introduce the three principles of va and unpack the line of inquiry used to answer RQ1b) How does co-presence influence the relational space (va fealoaloa’i), sacred space (va tapuia), and the ideology of feagaiga (covenant) between a Samoan male and female? Each principle has subquestions that assist in addressing RQ1b.

1.8.2 Va fealoaloa’i – Relational Space

The va fealoaloa’i is the space between all relationships that encourages unity and harmony and like all values is nurtured within the aiga and nu’u (family and village). The way in which individuals relate to their family members is the basis of how one relates in the village or community essentially because the definition of ‘family’ exceeds the palagi nuclear family of 2 parents and 1-2 children, as the Samoan aiga is defined under the village titles and boundary lines not necessarily dependant on blood lines (Anae, 2010, Lui, 2003).

In the Tongan culture, the term va or va’ha recognises this relational space as one of connection (Kaili, 2005) which in the same way is demonstrated in fa’asamoa (the Samoan way of life). When I first met the Sa’o (high chief) of my fieldwork site, I was asked about my genealogy and my village. Tongans and Samoans (generally most Pacific cultures) believe that the connections of our ancestors tie us to our land or village and create an identity (fa’asinomaga) that gives context to our background. The following chapter discusses my research design and recounts many occasions where I reconnected with kin who, at face value, were research participants. After a few questions, my enquirers began to have revelatory expressions in recognition that they knew my lineage and began to relocate and connect our socio-spatial worlds (Kaili, 2005, Mahina.O, 2010). As I continue this inquiry into mobile practises in rural Samoa, I explore the possibilities of the mobile phone as an alternative to the va fealoaloa’i. Will
the mobile phone re-establish socio-spatial worlds through mediated spaces? Can the contents of one’s phone contacts establish the same connections as Kaili (2005) describes?

1.8.3 The Va Tapuia, Sacred Spaces of Relational Arrangements

*Tapu* is a Polynesian word that means sacred or taboo. For Samoans, *tapu* indicates something that is subject to certain restrictions because it has a sacred essence that Samoans believe reinforces their connection or relationship with all things, gods, cosmos, environment and self. The *va tapuia* refers to the *space between* man and all things living and dead. (Anae, 2010) Samoa’s Head of State and Pacific scholar, His Excellency Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi, states his further thoughts on the *va tapuia*:

> It implies that in our relations with all things, living and dead there exists a sacred essence, a life force beyond human reckoning. The distinction here between what is living and what is dead is premised not so much on whether a life force, that is, a mauli or fatu manava, exists in the thing (that is, whether a life breath or heartbeat exudes from it), but whether that thing, living or dead, has a genealogy (in an evolutionary sense rather than in terms of human procreation) that connects to a life force. In the Samoan indigenous religion all matter, whether human, water, animal, plant and the biosphere are issues of *Tagaloaalelagi*. They are divine creations connected by genealogy.

(Tui Atua, 2009)

The reference to *Tagaloaalelagi* alludes to Samoa’s polytheist history. Prior to Christianity, Samoans believed in two main categories of gods: the non-human gods, *Atua*, and those of human origin that are half men/half gods, *Aitu* (Meleisea, 1987 pg 35). *Tagaloa* means *Atua* or God creator and *Tagaloaalelagi* is creator of the heavens. Humans were made by *Tagaloaalelagi*, as was all matter, humans, water animals and plants. According to Tui Atua (2009), Samoans believe that humans are the younger brother to *Tagaloaalelagi’s* earlier creations. In Samoan
genealogical terms, humans are the lesser, and their relationship with earlier creations is one of respect or fa’aaloalo:

“The respect or fa’aaloalo that must be shown by people to all things is a respect for the sacred essence, the sacred origins, of their beginnings. This is the cornerstone of Samoan indigenous religious thought “

(Atua, 2009.pg.3)

The acceptance of Christianity by Samoans altered their belief system as the va tapuia now included the teachings from the Holy Bible and the origins of man was taught not as involving Tagaloaalelagi, but rather God and his son Jesus Christ. During my fieldwork, this esoteric space had been a topic of much debate where the mobile phone was concerned. The connections between the after-world and reality are easily bridged by the va tapuia, and this thesis explores urban legends that include the mobile phones being used by demi-gods.

1.8.4 Teu le va: Nurturing the Relationships and Tidying Up the Va

The third principle of va is a call to nurture the space in-between, premised on forgiveness and reconciliation. It is the reason I hypothesize that the va’s cyclic nature does not change the va. The literal translation of teu lelei le va is (teu) to tidy, beautify, decorate; (lelei) good, pleasing, and (le va) the space in-between. This saying (for me) embodies the code that all Samoans live by. It is the unspoken covenant between one Samoan to another to nurture and cherish the space in between relationships (Tiatia 2012, Wendt 1996, Anae 2010). To break this code is offensive to the family and community and is seen as crossing boundary lines (Siauane 2006).

Samoans are described as relational and thrive in collective contexts. It is difficult to take a Samoan out of a collective context because there is no such thing as a Samoan person who is independent of others. Samoans believe that one cannot prosper by themselves, and so when in need, Samoans look after one another (Tamasese et al. 2005). These beliefs and ideals require a great deal of cooperation from all parties in these collective contexts, and when the va between these parties is violated or offence enters into the space, both parties are
expected to *teu le va* no matter who is in the wrong. This can be done in the form of an apology from the perpetrator and the releasing of forgiveness by the victim. Most disputes are handled by the *pule nu’u* (mayor), who often facilitates the mediation process. In more serious cases (e.g., physical abuse, murder, adultery), or where the offended party is from another village, an *ifoga* is required in which the guilty party must seek forgiveness from the victim’s family through the act of *ifoga*, meaning to bow down in submission (Macpherson and Macpherson, 2005).

The family with a matai leading the ifoga would sit outside the residence of the matai of the injured person’s family with fine mats over their heads offering themselves as objects for venting anger and revenge by the victim’s family. In doing so, the matai and his aiga humble themselves to the mercy of the aggrieved family and are exposed to serious harm and even death. When and if the victim’s family accepts the ifoga, speeches of reconciliation are made accompanied by presentation of fine mats and food as offerings of amends (Va’ai 1999:51).

*(Macpherson and Macpherson, 2005)*

*Ifoga* is still practised today; however, the most a perpetrator will suffer is to sit outside the victims’ house for days and nights, without food or water, until forgiveness is released. When a person is asked to *teu le va* it is taken seriously. The process is not straightforward, but multilayered, and is fraught with complexities. However, if one views all reciprocal relationships with others as sacred, then much value will be placed on nurturing this space. To *teu le va* requires a mutual respect for the *va, va tapuea,* and *va fealoaloa’i.* From this literature, one can glimpse the complexities of *va.* In its most simplistic form, however, *va* is about maintaining good relations and doing what is necessary to nurture the *va,* especially when offence has entered the space.

This study draws out the similarities of the space in-between in Tonga, Samoa, and Hawai’i and touches on Tongan transnationality and the way transnational relations affirm connected social spaces amongst Tongans. The Tongan
equivalent of *teu le va* is called *tauhi va*. Pacific anthropologist Tevita Kaili’s (2005) work on *tauhi va* took him to Hawai‘i to re-establish and nurture the socio-spatial ties shared with Hawai‘i through the legend of Maui. Although this thesis does not focus primarily on transnationalism, the diaspora movement of Samoans globally implies its inclusion in dialogue with participants. This investigation of mobile usage in rural Samoa explores whether the mediated space takes the form of nurturing relationships locally and transnationally, and how it influences the *va*.

### 1.9 Defining the Space In-Between for This Research

Having briefly reviewed the literature on *va*, the next section presents a model that was developed to illustrate the different dimensions of the principles of *va* and eventually show, in a rural village setting, how these areas are influenced by mobile phone usage. The *va* model is premised on values of *fa‘asamoa*, which the principles of *va* embody. *Fa‘asamoa* is broad and cannot be confined to one aspect. It is made up of many components, including family (*aiga*), culture, language, and religion (Meleisea 1992). During my ethnography, I identified that *fa‘asamoa* is expressed or lived out in spaces that Samoans transition into at certain times and during certain occasions. These spaces are intangible but can be ‘housed’ in different structures (fale *tele* or an office), or indeed no structure at all, since the *va* is a presence that is carried by all Samoans. I felt that the best way to illustrate this presence is through a spherical model in which I categorised the three different spaces using the components of this definition of *fa‘asamoa*, “a set of principals or code of conduct steeped in tradition enacted in ceremonial rituals and every day practises” (Siauane, 2006.pg 19). These spaces are laid out in the table and diagram below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sphere 1</th>
<th>A set of principals or code of conduct steeped in tradition and enacted in ceremonial rituals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A space, event or conversation where cultural protocols are observed. Information Communication Technologies (ICT) are not permitted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• **Sphere 2**

**Everyday Practises**

- Of Village Samoa (rural) where there are fewer, but some, limitations on Information Communication Technology use.

• **Sphere 3**

**Everyday Practises**

- Urban Samoa where there is the strongest Western influence and village hierarchy is not emphasised as strongly as it is in rural Samoa. Information Communication Technologies are used with very few or no restrictions.

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**Figure 1. Va Model**

This conceptual model of the *va* attempts to identify the explicit and the implicit areas of *va* in order to bring context to further discussion throughout the thesis. The colour red indicates the level of traditional protocols that are observed within these zones. The highest concentration of this colour is in Sphere 1. Access points and non-access points are for ICTs only. The villagers move freely within the *va* but the spheres or zones dictate what behaviour is expected. This correlates to the circumference of the circle not having any access points. This signals a technology free zone where a traditional meeting or gathering is taking place which may include the village, such as
at village council meetings or kava ceremonies, or they could be on a smaller scale within the home during the village curfew for prayer where the va tapuia (sacred space) is respected.

As indicated in the grid above, Sphere 2 is where the everyday of village life occurs. This sphere has two notable differences to Sphere 1. First, it is a lighter shade of red and its circumference has 360 degrees of access points. The access points (and their width) represent the amount of ICTs that the villagers are allowed access to on a daily basis; for example, people can listen to the radio or watch television during the day, but should a chief visit the head of house the appliances will be either switched off or the volume lowered depending on the nature of the visit. If it is a youth enjoying this technology, it is likely they will switch them off and serve the guests refreshments and observe the va of respect for their guest.

Sphere 3 represents urban Samoa, the capital Apia and its surrounding villages. Its pink colour and the circumference access points indicate a typical modernised environment where ICTs are broadly used and fa’asamoa protocols, although practiced, acknowledge that these technologies are also essential for the business at hand. An example would be a government meeting that starts with prayer and traditional speeches and a secretary taking minutes on a laptop or setting up a presentation via an audio visual. This thesis uses the va as a lens to analyse the behaviour of Samoans with respect to the mobile phone. In certain ceremonial spaces it is offensive to use mobile phones, but outside of these spaces, they are allowed, but with some restrictions. As previously discussed, the va is mostly intangible, almost like an invisible line that all parties are aware of. In order to incite discussion regarding how the mobile phone impacts the va, it is important to delineate these boundaries to illustrate how the va is influenced by mobile usage, where is it most influenced, and why there is variation. The following chapters will provide empirical evidence gathered during my time in Island Breeze on how the mobile phone is used in these different spheres. I build on the argument that in rural villages where fa’amatai is observed, the va, as an overriding influence, causes the slow uptake of mobile usage.
1.9.1 Outline of This Thesis

To understand these emergent practices, I begin by introducing va and the parallels between the principles of va and the properties of the mobile phone, primarily place (tangible) and co-presence (intangible). Chapter 2 examines how, in cultural settings like Samoa, research methodologies that are culturally sensitive and academically robust are vital for ethnographic research. It describes the innovative methodology of fusing talanoa (Vaioleti 2006), a Pacific methodology, with the traditional anthropological approach of ethnography in order to bring balance to the dichotomy of the Samoan culture and Western research culture. It provides a narrative of my experience as an insider-outsider navigating my research design to accommodate the va and exploring participation techniques that reflected my immersion in the village, which enabled me to closely detail my participants’ movements from a privileged position of observation. I have used pseudonyms throughout the thesis to protect the identity of my participants.

In understanding how the mobile phone influences the va it is important to identify how it fits into the wider communicative ecologies of the village. How often is the mobile phone used? Why would my participants choose to use it or not use it? Chapter three argues that despite the ubiquity of the mobile phone in Samoa, ownership does not necessarily indicate high rate of usage, particularly in Island Breeze where traditional means of communication remain central to everyday communication. I demonstrate the richness of traditional village communication, pointing out the communicative assemblages (Slater 2013) to explain how it meets villagers’ communication needs. Insights into how the village rules and va in a rural village setting influence the non-use of mobile phones highlights the tangible aspects of mobile usage and their effects on place mobility in village Samoa.

Chapter 4, examines how mediated spaces have a strong influence on the va fealoaloa‘i or relational space, particularly the feagaiaga (covenant) between a Samoan male and female. It explores the properties of these mediated spaces in relation to the va and argues that the mobile phone accelerates the process of ‘boy meets girl’, illustrating how the mobile phone provides people with an agency that has violated the feagaiga. I highlight the
moral panic sparked through Digicel’s “Free Nights” promotion that offers customers free calls and texts between the hours of 11:00 pm to 6:00am. I argue that although the mobile phone has been a conduit for inappropriate relations that have violated the principles of va, its influence on the va is not permanent because of the cyclic nature of va. This illustrates that, contextually the va has flaws; however, in the context of a rural village, its principles are designed to restore harmony to the relational space.

Chapter 5 looks at the intangible properties of va, which are called the sacred space or va tapuia. These are rooted in Samoan in mythology and culture. Samoans believe that the va existed before they did and define it as a space of relational arrangements that accommodates all things living and dead (Tui Atua, 2009). This chapter argues that mobile phone practices in rural Samoa are absorbed by the va tapuia because the intangible properties of va absorb different phenomena a (Tui Atua 2009) and has transcended the many transitions of ancient Samoa to survive and, indeed, flourish, in the independent and modern nation that Samoa is today. I look at the modernisation of Samoa through Christianity and how this change opened up a platform for Western influence, transforming Samoa from a polytheist to a monotheist belief system. I illustrate the tension between these two beliefs through local stories of the mobile phone as a protagonist in encounters with ghosts or demons (aitu) and how they are used to influence social order.

Chapter 6 re-visits the va model to illustrate how, why, and where the mobile fits in the space in-between. It contrasts the va model with empirical evidence that illustrates mobile use in a contextual framework. The va model was developed to position the va in an academic framework and illustrate the boundaries of va and its tangible and intangible qualities. This chapter discusses evidence from my fieldwork concerning how the va is lived out in a rural Samoan village and how the mobile phone influences the space in-between the hierarchy and fa’amatai system, its use and non-use in the village communicative ecologies, its place in Samoan mythology, and its role in secret liaisons facilitated by mediated spaces identified in this context as va fa’apouliuli. The va model is re-introduced as
the Mobile Va Model, with the intention of illustrating the mobile phone’s ‘place’ in the va and to discuss the reality of fa’amobile and other mobile-related influences in this context.

The final chapter returns to the main research question: How is the concept of va influenced and changed by mobile phone practices in rural Samoa? I demonstrate how the fa’amatai structure of a Samoan village limits the place mobility of the mobile phone, impeding the novelty of being contactable anywhere and at any time. A major component of this finding is that the communicative ecologies within the fa’amatai system are the reason for the slow up-take of mobile usage in rural Samoa. The traditional means of communication that enrich the communicative ecologies of my research site, Island Breeze, and the Samoan concept of va, are factors in the slow up-take of this ubiquitous device.

The second lens of analysis is the intangible lens of va, in which the va is regarded as a relational arrangement that accommodates all things living and dead (Tui Atua, 2009). Bringing together a conceptual va model that emerged from my fieldwork, I analyse how mediated spaces of co-presence and social presence conflict with the covenant between a Samoan male and female (feagaiga), the va fealoaloa’i, where all familial relationships are built on respect and trust and why urban legends of demi-gods texting Samoan youth to stop using the mobile phone exist.

The va is embedded in Samoan culture and has remained a key governing principle in Samoa from colonisation to independence, and throughout the island nation’s modernisation.

In considering how the mobile practices of rural Samoans influence or change the va, this research seeks to answer this question through ethnographic research and analysis of the va attending to the intangible lens of va illustrates the anonymity and easy accessibility that mobile phone communication offers to individuals. Focusing upon the intangible also highlights the accelerated pace at which agency is gained by youth through mobile phone usage. This acceleration of agency acquisition has created conflict within families and has become a conduit for the start of inappropriate relations. It is through mediated and hidden spaces that the mobile phone has the strongest
influence on va, and evidence from this research indicates that the cyclic nature of va brings restoration to any breach between the village, family, and individuals.
2.0 Researching Mobile Communication in Samoa

In this chapter I address the question of what would constitute an appropriate research design to encompass both the village’s rules and my research objectives. This chapter argues that evidence for the slow uptake of mobile phone usage in Island Breeze is largely due to the village being under indigenous rule (*fa’amatai*), and that this shapes and defines the village structure and communication. The traditional structure of Island Breeze and the influence of *va* in the everyday demands that my research design take account of cultural sensitivities. A range of such sensitivities have influenced the research approaches taken by theorists from both Pacific and Western contexts. Moreover, there is a need to reflect on how my own identity as a New Zealand-born Samoan, my culture, and my values influence my academic framework. I will illustrate the components of a traditional Samoan village to provide background information as to why mobile phone usage is inhibited by village rules. This explanation will set up a foundation for my in-depth analysis of the village’s communicative ecologies in the next chapter.

This chapter also illustrates the cultural context of *va* in an academic framework by establishing the relevance of *talanoa* (Vaioleti, 2006) to ethnographic research in Samoa. *Talanoa* is a framework relevant to research in a Pacific context. It further establishes what is meant by *va* through my experience as a Samoan ethnographer and my interface within a traditional Samoan village. The relational aspect of *va* is illustrated through my discussions about the aspect of participant observations in ethnographic research, particularly with one of the two groups I associated with, which were the Women’s Committee or *Komiti a Tina* (*Komiti*) and the Trust that hosted my stay. I focus mainly on the participatory observation approach I used with the *Komiti* because it illustrates the combination of ethnography and *talanoa*. 
My primary data was collected through ethnographic research that incorporated participatory observation, workshops, interviews, audio recordings, photographs, field notes, and a questionnaire. The questionnaire assisted me in mapping communicative ecologies, which helped me to develop an understanding of the ways each instance of communication takes place within the village. Consent to interview my participants were garnered by addressing the hierarchy in the village and for my research it was the Komiti. I expand on how I approach the Komiti in section 2.5.1 of this chapter. I had an ethics approved consent form translated to Samoan which my interview participants read and signed. My participants are also recorded on audio as consenting to the interview.

Alongside this ethnographic research, I incorporated talanoa, a culturally-appropriate methodology that bridges the disparity of objectivity in traditional academic research and the kinds of participant subjectivity that are usually found in Pacific contexts (Vaioleti 2006). I explain talanoa later in this chapter but it is an approach that recognises, in a Pacific context, variables such as age, gender, and the community standing of the researcher affect the results in particular ways. While these and other variables are often incorporated into anthropological studies, their particular meanings are often overlooked in Western-framed research in the Pacific. Paying attention to the specific ways in which such variables manifest in Samoa allowed me to achieve better-contextualized interaction with Pacific participants, which in turn led into the creation of “authentic knowledge” (Vaioleti, pg 23, 2006).

Throughout my interaction with my participants I was conscious of nurturing the va between us throughout talanoa and the everyday.

### 2.0.1 Fieldwork Sites

My research site is a coastal village on Samoa’s main island, Upolu. This village is widely considered to be one of the most traditional villages in the district. I spent seven months living there and exploring the influence of mobile phones on Samoan traditions and culture. Island Breeze is deemed a traditional village because it has chosen to follow the indigenous rule of fa’amatai. Since Samoa’s independence the adoption of parliamentary democracy alongside indigenous rule has given every village the choice to remain under fa’amatai or to be governed by local
law enforcement (Iati, 2013), as is often the case in villages in urban Samoa. In order to understand communication practises in urban Samoa, I spent one month in the capital city, Apia, where I conducted interviews with professionals working in education, government, and the private sector. Participants were given a consent form (English version) to read through and sign before they were recorded saying that they consent to the interview. Consent from village hierarchy did not apply in these interviews. Although I lived in a village within the town area, life there differed markedly from the traditional norms practiced in Island Breeze. The capital city, Apia, has had a strong Western influence on its neighbouring villages, and subsequently some customary practices are no longer upheld or deemed relevant.

2.1 An Introduction to Island Breeze

Island Breeze is a typical coastal village where many Samoan fale (open style houses) lines the shore alongside canoes and fishing boats. The village is known for the cool breeze from the ocean that tempers the island’s hot and very humid weather. Island Breeze has a population of less than 500 people and is located in a district with a population of 4,546 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics 2013). The village is organised around a malae, a large open space where meetings are held, that faces the ocean. It is surrounded by homes ranging from the traditional fale to the conventional 3-4 bedroom house typically found in Western countries. Some houses are modest, while others reflect the ‘wealth’ or high ranking of the families residing in them. The fale is a thatched roof supported by wooden beams that rests on an oval or square concrete foundation. It has no walls, which allows the breeze to pass through on hot days and nights. Between every beam are handmade flax blinds that are hoisted above each beam and released to provide privacy and shelter. A tar sealed road with no footpath provides access for travellers in cars and on foot. Every property has a fale or house with its own colourful interior and exterior décor. Thanks to the village’s policy on keeping the village clean; Island Breeze is lush and well-maintained.

Coastal villages such as Island Breeze are vulnerable to damage from seasonal cyclones and storms. In 2009, a tsunami destroyed most structures in the villages. There was an enormous loss of lives; homes, sustainable
farming, and plantations (Wendt Young & Keil, 2010). The devastation of the 2009 tsunami facilitated a series of new projects to enhance life in the village. The high chief of Island Breeze is an entrepreneur and has a vision for the village to become an eco-friendly sustainable village. His vision extends to building a local economy that is free from foreign aid and that is viable and stable. The sustainable village, now in the process of being constructed, will include an arts centre and a café. It will offer kayaking and canoeing facilities, an eco-garden, and market days for buyers and sellers. This vision has been met with much resistance as Island Breeze has a reputation for adhering to Samoan tradition and protocols. The tension of implementing outward-oriented development goals within a traditional village hierarchy that has strong links to fa’asamoa has caused the project to be halted several times.

The inclusion of mobile phones in an environment where indigenous means of communication are embedded into the everyday enhances this tension and is explored in depth in Chapter 3.

To give context to my research site and what is meant by a traditional Samoan village, the next section embarks on an analysis of the traditional processes of communication in Island Breeze. It begins by explaining the Samoan way of life (fa’asamoa), since the va is embedded in fa’asamoa and a key component of this research. Second, I describe the hierarchy of the village and its communication practices via the fa’amatai socio-metric wheel (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998). This model and structure is held together by the va and the social roles that it prescribes. Disseminating the village structure is a means to understanding the traditional profile of Island Breeze and why there is tension between fa’asamoa and new developments and technologies. I conclude with a reflexive analysis of my research methods, empirical evidence, and experiences in Island Breeze.

2.1.1 Tradition and Culture

The Samoan cultural and social structure is centred on fa’asamoa, which can be translated as the Samoan way of life or “the manner of the Samoans; according to Samoan customs and tradition” (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1998, p. 185). There are differing opinions on what fa’asamoa means or entails. Scholars argue that to define fa’asamoa as a ‘way of life’ places restrictions on it as it does not embody the richness of the culture, which is steeped in
traditions enacted in ceremonial rituals and every day practises by Samoans (Siauane, 2006). Meleisea defines *fa’asamoa* as “a political and economic system...as a framework based upon the social structure of the aiga and the nu’u (village) and the authority of matai and fono (chief and council), new practices, ideas and goods could be accepted and incorporated into it so that either the system remained unchanged in its essentials, or else was not perceived to have changed fundamentally” (Meleisea, 1987, pg.16-17). It can be described as a set of principals or code of conduct that Samoans live by; however, for the purposes of this research I used the three elements of Meleisea’s definition to illustrate the communication processes of this ‘institution’ and to identify the traditional methods of communication within *fa’asamoa*. These include:

1. *Aiga* (family, immediate and extended);
2. *nu’u* or the village; and
3. The authority of *matai* and *fono* (chief and the council).

There are many elements to *fa’asamoa*, but the principles of this way of life are founded on respect, religion, and service.

2.1.2 Aiga

*Aiga* is the Samoan word for family. As in most Pacific cultures, *aiga* extends beyond the nucleus of the conventional two parents and two children family of normative Western models. *Aiga* is not limited to the immediate family, but extends to cousins, in-laws, and even encompasses members of the village because the concept on *aiga* is also linked to cultural land ties. *Fa’asamoa* is modelled or demonstrated rather than explicitly taught in the home, at a young age, family members will have already acquired an understanding of their place and role in their family and the village, and will eventually come to understand their place in society. Stewart-Withers describes this as the “socialisation process of child/adult respect which occurs from a very young age, whereby children learn to obey and serve their parents without question’ (Maiava 2001 as quoted in Stewart-Withers, 2008, pg 174). Meleisea (1992, p. 64) refers to the “iron discipline and conformity” that is a part of Samoan society. This is also reinforced with reference to biblical scriptures, with 90% of Samoans professing to be
Christian. Disobedience is often punished: as Stewart-Withers explains, “Obedience and love are equated at an early age” (Stewart-Withers, 2008, pg 174). The contention here is that children grow up to be adults, and although have their own independence they are still expected to obey their parents without question. This conflict is faced by every Samoan, but those who are immersed in the culture are more accepting of this than others who have only a peripheral experience of fa’asamoa. This is more evident of Samoans in diaspora living in ‘developed’ nations like New Zealand or America, where the pressure on the migrant parent is to keep the culture ‘alive’ through their children, whereas the pressure on the children is to adapt to the ‘secular’ culture of the West while maintaining the values and expectations of fa’asamoa (Gershon, 2012).

Respect and service are tenets that are dependent upon one another and embody the essence of fa’asamoa. Fa’aloalo (respect) and tautua (service) go hand-in-hand as fa’asamoa ideology equates the serving of others with the highest form of respect. Examples of this abound when there is a fa’alavelave, which is an umbrella term that covers certain occasions that requires the aiga to come together (in unity, to offer financial and family support) to ensure the correct cultural protocols for an event are fulfilled. An occasion can be a celebration of a wedding or the farewelling of a loved one who has died. At any one of these occasions, the aiga come together with monetary gifts, food, and l’e toga (fine mats). L’e toga is a symbol of wealth (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998) and used in ceremonies.

The gifts given in the spirit of aiga, are symbols of support, love, and blessing. Fa’aloalo (respect) and tautua (service) are expected to be shown in the form of a meaalofoa (gift) and through the act of serving other guests who have come to pay their respects. Service is usually defined as being in the kitchen to assist with food preparation, serving guests, and being available throughout the ceremonial rituals of fa’asamoa. Although the men of the village are also trained in hospitality and service, these duties are expected of the female members of the aiga. The strength of the culture is experienced when a fa’alavelave occurs and the extended family (local and in diaspora) pool their resources (gifts, money) in support of their loved ones and to represent the title holder of the family (Siauane, 2006).
2.1.3 The Village, Chief, and Council

A Samoan village is comprised of its own structure and governance. This indigenous self-governing system survived the period of occupancy by the German and New Zealand administrators often agitating the foreigner’s plans for full sovereignty (Davidson 1967). The purpose of this section is to consider the communication structure and processes found within the organisational structure of a Samoan village. I will examine the core components of the village structure and their functions. Firstly, the village or nu’u is the more than just a place a Samoan hails from or was raised. It signifies the cultural backdrop and understanding of a person. When Samoans are introduced to one another two questions are asked: what village you come from, and what your family name is. It does not matter if you were born outside of Samoa and have never stepped foot on Samoan soil. It is expected that you know your Samoan heritage. This knowledge is passed onto the aiga through verbal communication and family discussions.

The social and cultural structures of the nu’u are dependent on everyone fulfilling their roles. The core roles are the matai (chiefs), fono (village council), and the men and women’s groups.

Local government remains the responsibility of each village and, in some cases, sub-villages, and is firmly rooted in the traditional system of village and district government. Power is exercised by the village fono comprising the group of alii and faipule (chiefs and orators) which has jurisdiction over a wide range of areas affecting custom and the social and economic welfare of each village. A continuing challenge is to ensure that this form of village government remains a meaningful mechanism for meeting the contemporary needs of the village population, a requirement that, among other things, calls for the maintenance of an effective working relationship between the village fono and the central government.

(Fairbairn-Dunlop 1998, pg 237)
The *fa'amatai* system is the political authority in the village and determines the village social structure and governance (Howe 1984, p. 230 as cited by Stewart-Withers 2012 pg 173). It was described by Pacific researcher Tagaloatele Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop as the “socio-metric wheel (fig.2) on which Samoan society turns; this system of chiefly rule was based on a system of rights and obligations whereby all family members shared equal rights to family resources including rights to land and to be the family chief, and in turn, family members used these resources to work to achieve the family good” (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998, pg 4, 5). It is responsible for determining the status and roles of the men and women of the village. These groups were given clear tasks to serve the *matai* (includes all ranks) and the *fono* (Council or Administration). The division of groups were as follows:

The *Nu’u a tama’ita’i* (Village of the Ladies) encompasses the *aua luma*, which is comprised of the unmarried, divorced, and widowed daughters of the village; the *faletua ma tausi*, which is made up of the wives of the titled men; the *ava a taulele’a*, who are the wives of the untitled men, and then the *Nu’u a Ali’i* (Village of the Gentlemen). Although the women’s and men’s villages are separate, they all belong and live in the same village but are divided by the type of work they are expected to do.

The *aua luma* is a powerful and influential women’s group in the village. Traditionally they attended to the *Taupou*, who is usually the daughter of the paramount chief, and who uphold the virtuous status of being a virgin (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998, Meleisea, 1992, p. 15; pp. 26–27; Saolotoga, 1995, p. 21 as cited by Stewart-Withers, 2012 pg 173). The status of the *aua luma* status is higher than that of the wives, and is on par with that of titled men. They have their own meeting house and are the *faioloa* or wealth-makers as they weave fine mats and other crafts that are held in high value in Samoa society. (Sio, 2006).

The *ava a taulele’a* the wives of untitled men, are considered to have the lowest adult ranking in the village and were responsible for the domestic tasks. The *faletua ma tausi*, are the wives of titled men and out-rank the *ava a taulele’a*. The *ava a taulele’a* are women who married into the village, also known as *nofo tane*. There were strict
rules about marrying from within the village because villagers are extended kin; therefore, nofo tane “held a subordinate status to her husband and his family because through marriage her husband had conquered not only her sacredness but also her family’s esteem” (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996, p. 8). A wife had no rights in her husband’s village and should the marriage break up, she was expected to return to her own village where she then resumes the status of daughter of the village (Stewart-Withers 2012).

![Fa’amatai Socio-metric Wheel](image)

Figure 2 Fa’amatai Socio-metric Wheel

Having set up the foundation of a traditional village and the different groups that make up the fa’amatai, the final sections of this chapter uncover the research methods I employed to navigate through the cultural politics embedded in fa’asamo’a to meet my research objectives and expectations of my cultural heritage as a Samoan.

Central to these elements of fa’asamo’a and fa’amatai is the va described in the first chapter as a code of conduct that governs the ways that Samoans interact with one another. Cultural and practical understandings of the va as a code and a communication tool not only assisted in analysis of how it is influenced by mobile phone usage but was
also, more importantly, instrumental in gaining access to the different village groups and building a strong rapport with my research participants. I describe this process in the following sections.

2.2 Makeover to ‘Make-under’

There is a saying in Samoa, “e loa le tagata i lona tu ma aga,” which loosely translates as “a person’s character or upbringing is known by how they act and talk”; in other words, how I conducted myself as I lived among the people will also be an indication of how much I know and understand about Samoan culture. This exercise is not just about being accepted by the village, but more so about representing one’s family. This put extra pressure on me while undertaking my fieldwork. Living in a village where I did not know anyone personally created some anxiety, as I felt as if I was on ‘display’ throughout my ethnography. It is almost a reverse ethnography, because initially the villagers had no context of my background and upbringing, and so I was judged as to how ‘Samoan’ I really am through my speech and actions. At the other end of the spectrum, I was subject to academic pressure to “stand outside the frame” (Halstead, 2001, pg.307) in opposition to the other. Standing outside the frame was difficult as I just explained; being a Samoan researcher meant different criteria of acceptance from the villagers and building relationships required me to be inside the frame. I relate my experiences to Halstead’s (2001) discussions on the nuances of studying her own society and the problem of gaining enough distance. The importance of reflexivity, an approach of constant questioning and refining my data analysis, was instrumental in finding a balance between my role as a researcher and my relationship with my participants (Halstead, 2001). Although this period was a little uncomfortable, I had learned from other Samoan settings that once my ‘audience’ can see that I am following protocol and can at least speak the language, they would likely be quite receptive and appreciative of my effort. The best I could do was to know my cultural heritage and be ready to serve the village through my capacity as a Samoan researcher using the tools of reflexivity and talanoa throughout my ethnography. Talanoa is explained further on in this chapter and is an indigenous approach to ethnography with similar principles to reflexivity.
Ethnography is hard to define because it is used in many disciplines (O'Reilly, 2005, Pink et al. 2015), but it has been described as “the researcher participating, overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time” (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, pg.1-10, as quoted by Punch, 2009, pg.124). Developing research relationships is key to gaining access to information that would otherwise be undiscovered. In my journey to full immersion I underwent what I termed a ‘make-under’ in order to blend into the community. Prior to fieldwork I had been colouring my hair from black to a caramel base with blonde streaks. I enjoy having the freedom to wear my hair in any style or colour and had been doing so for almost a decade. I was now faced with the awful reality that I should return to my original colour, dark brownish-black, because it would help with my entry into the village. It is not to say that people in Samoa do not colour their hair or are unaccepting of Samoans with blonde streaks, but I wanted to remove any barriers to how I would initially be perceived. It felt like I was externally losing my identity to gain an identity. The contrast of how I lived out my ‘Samoa-ness’ in the Western world did not fit in village Samoa, but I already had a place of ethnic belonging and this ‘change’ was not about my identity but removing visual barriers in order to assist my research participants to identify with me as part of their community. Throughout my research, I alternated between the insider and outsider role depending on whether it was a first encounter with participants or a group I had built a good rapport with. It wasn’t long before it felt like I was doing ethnography ‘at home’ as the village was similar to my home village and the community had accepted me as a daughter of the village but I did not have issues with being too close or withdrawing from the community (O'Reilly, 2008) which I expand on further in section 2.2.2.

2.2.1 Methodological Frameworks: Bringing Ethnography and Talanoa Together

This research brought together ethnographic approaches with an approach called talanoa, derived from a Tongan perspective which is described as “the ancient practice of multi-level and multi-layered critical discussions and free conversations. It also includes the way that community, business and agency leaders receive information from the community, which they then use to make decisions about civil, church and national matters” (Vaioleti, 2006.
Vaioleti (2006) further asserts that *talanoa* occurs in everyday conversation, while working together, doing chores around the house, or collaborating on a project.

The three principles of *talanoa* manifested in different ways as I interacted daily with different participants and groups. These three principles are:

1) Face-to-face: *Talanoa* removes the distance between researcher and participant, and provides research participants with a human face they can relate to. This is an ideal method of research because relationships are the

2) Foundation on which most Pacific activities are built (Vaioleti 2006, pg.26,) I found that people’s responses differed as I observed or interviewed participants, who ranged from the lowest- to highest-ranking in the village. Those from the lowest rank in the women’s village were more engaging and open, which allowed the conversation to flow. There was a sense of reciprocity as we discussed mobile phones in their context. In my initial dialogue with the president or vice president of the Komiti, I found that I had no control over the flow of conversation because I was very aware that they are the gate keepers of their knowledge and it is up to them if they wanted to discuss it with me. This power dynamic caused my approach as a researcher to be open to whichever direction the conversation took. This is explained in the second *talanoa* principle.

2) Conversation has a life of its own: *Talanoa* is a good conversation in which one listens to the other. When one speaks and what one says depend upon what the other has to say. An open technique is employed in which the precise nature of the questions has not been determined in advance, but changes depend on the way in which the *talanoa* develops. The *talanoa* will end when it loses its *malie* or starts to revisit areas covered already, since then it is probable that no more new points will be added to those that have been co-constructed. It is a respectful, reciprocating interaction (Vaioleti, 2006, pg.26,). Conversation would have a life of its own. Often I was listening rather than talking or raising questions or topics of discussion, but this is the process of *talanoa*. In the process of
these conversations, the third principal, Reciprocity and Respect, would occur in which the ranking chiefs would take time to define my place or role within their context.

3) Reciprocity and Respect: *Talanoa* firmly places the power to define what the Pacific issues are within the encounter between the researcher and the participant. Participants will disclose information only when they feel the time is right and that the context is appropriate. If protocols are ignored, the participants may end the *talanoa*. Even worse, they may communicate (utu, totongi) the wrong information to teach researchers a lesson, to remind them of their obligations in this symbiotic relationship (Vaioletti, 2006, pg.26).

The fusing of ethnography and *talanoa* provided a balance of cultural values and research practices. Throughout my ethnography I was very aware of my language and behaviour. Sometimes it was simple things that challenged my judgement, such as pulling out the Dictaphone during a discussion or making notes in the middle of a meeting. These ‘little’ things were necessary for my research but could have been viewed as culturally inappropriate; however, because I had taken the necessary precautions in approaching the Komiti and the high chief in a culturally appropriate way, these actions were accepted.

The opportunity to work in the village fit well within my research, and holding structured interviews within my project work with the women’s committee providing an opportunity to interact with the villagers and apply *talanoa* principles around participation, all the while gathering data for my research.

I found ethnography instrumental in my data collection, as being immersed in a traditional Samoan village gave me a deeper understanding of the context and ‘living’ among the people gave me more access to their lives. An example of ‘access’ is that the villagers knew where I lived and that I was available to assist and work alongside them. This came to fruition through the opportunity to use participant observation when the Women’s Komiti asked me to teach them how to use computers. Participant observation “is the central data collection technique in ethnography. It differs from direct or non-participant observation in that the role of the researcher changes from
detached observer of the situation, to both participant in and observer of the situation” (Punch 2009, pg.157). I found this approach instrumental in building research relationships and uncovering rich data through conversations, working alongside my participants, and being “both participant in and observer of the situation” (Punch 2009, pg.157). These participatory techniques are seen as valuable in understanding a culture as well as effectively progress social change as seen in Tacchi et al. (2003) in Sri Lanka (Tacchi, Slater & Hearn, 2003, pg.12,13, finding A Voice: Toolbox 2015). A participatory technique I applied during my fieldwork was Ethnographic Action Research (EAR), an approach I expand on in chapter three. EAR is used to bring about new activities through novel understandings of situations. It includes communicative ecology mapping, sampling and selection, and semi-structured interviews, and describes a process by which initiative workers respond to new understandings of 'context' that result from ethnographic research and participatory techniques by reviewing their initiative's programme and planning new activities’ (Tacchi, Slater & Hearn 2003).

2.3 Insider-Outsider: Identity and Belonging

Karen O’Reilly describes ethnography as a means to obtain an “insider perspective and to gain insider accounts” (O’Reilly, 2008, pg.2). The foreign ethnographer’s goal is to gradually become socialised in the new community and have the opportunity to understand them and gain ‘insider’ knowledge. Ethnography ‘at home’ is when researchers do ethnography within their own communities or cities they grew up in. This positioned them as insiders from the outset. However, there has been a great deal of discussion and debate around the implications of ethnography ‘at home’. Critics argue that the anthropologist who enters an unfamiliar setting, one in which they are a stranger, will have issues with gaining insight, since locals are unlikely to share much information with them until sufficient trust is developed. Conversely, however, anthropologists working ‘at home’ may have issues with being too close to the community in which they are conducting research. The host society may have higher expectations of an “insider” than of an “outsider,” and these may conflict with the research agenda. Moreover, some critics have argued that outsiders have greater critical distance from their host society, and are therefore more able to interpret it
dispassionately (see, for example, Fabian 1983). However, these kinds of dichotomous arguments are undermined by the difficulty of defining who is an insider and who is an outsider. An anthropologist who works in the same community for years of decades may well come to take on insider status, while a person who is from the same broad culture but from a different village may always be considered to be a stranger. Constant reflexivity is therefore needed to assess the influence of “strangeness” or “insiderness” on the research process.

Although I am of Samoan descent, I was not raised in Samoa and my fieldwork site is a village that I am unfamiliar with. However, because I speak Samoan and am familiar with Samoan customs and protocol, my ethnographic experience differs somewhat from that of the foreigner ethnographer and exhibits elements of O’Reilly’s description of ‘ethnography at home.’ As a Samoan I would be expected to be part of the community, not to ‘gradually become socialised’ like the foreign ethnographer, but my integration is preceded by prejudice because Samoans born in diaspora are generally perceived as not being ‘real’ Samoans. I was accustomed to the differing opinions of what makes a ‘real’ Samoan and I anticipated from the outset of my fieldwork that I would have to go through an ‘insider-outsider’ phase before I was accepted.

My insider-outsider phase began with villagers’ expectations that I would ‘know’ the Samoan way, and that my integration into the community would not be gradual. I would be perceived as an outsider, but expected to behave as an insider, fitting in with the community and the village life. In preparation for this phase, I had discussions with the matai of my family and other cultural advisors on how I should represent myself in this context. Suaalii-Sauni (2010) has described a similar experience by Marina, a film writer of New Zealand who has Samoan ethnicity, who had the opportunity to perform the taupou (high chief’s daughter) dance at an ava ceremony (an esteemed protocol before a meeting that involves the drinking of kava). Marina questioned her ability to perform the role as she was an afakasi (half caste) child raised outside of Samoa with no knowledge of fa’asamoa or the language. Her maternal aunt’s response to these doubts was the straight forward statement, “It’s in your bones!” This was to say: “Why do you fret? You are Samoan. Just do it!” (Suaalii-Sauni, 2010, pg.71). Suaaluu-Sauni believes the aunt’s
words to be genuine, but is reminded of her own upbringing as a New Zealand-born Samoan and the expectations placed upon her:

“I was reminded of scenarios in my own family whereby my Samoan aunts would tell us “New Zealand-born Samoan kids” how stupid we were in no uncertain terms if we didn’t carry the ie toga (fine mat) in the “proper” way during ceremonial rituals. The impact of their words is more obviously negative than that of Marina’s aunt but the assumptions about knowing or not knowing – that is, the discourses of certainty deployed – are the same”

(Suaalii-Sauni, 2010, pg.72).

These assumptions about “knowing or not knowing” preceded every Samoan gathering or event I was part of or attended from child to adulthood and were a significant factor in the way I was raised. Although I was born in New Zealand, my upbringing was very Samoan. Language and fa’asamoa protocols were drilled into us at young age. My grandparents had migrated to New Zealand in the 1950s and the move had made them patriotic. They seemed to fear that their grandchildren would be in danger of losing the culture unless they taught them Samoan values.

From my own personal experience, I have experienced prejudice by Samoans who have openly been surprised that although I was raised in New Zealand I speak Samoan and understand the customs and my role in Samoan society. They would refer to the Samoan diaspora who had no understanding of these things as fia-palagi, a slang word that means “want to-be-Westernised.” It is derogatory and infers that the person has chosen the palagi (Western) way of life over fa’asamoa.

One definition of Samoan identity is embedded in the fa’amatai system that holds that there are three elements to being Samoan. The first is the suafa or matai title, the second is fanua or the land that the suafa governs over, and the third is the Samoan language, le gagana Samoa (Suaalii-Sauni, 2010, pg.72). This definition highly contrasts Marina’s aunt’s definition of ‘Samoaness,’ and although it was a comment her aunt made, these two contrasting definitions of what a Samoan is or is not, are similar to the assumptions I had to contend with in a
Pacific context, and later, more intensely, during my ethnography. The next phase of my insider / outsider experience was the ‘doing’ of fieldwork.

2.4 Engaging with the Community

As noted in the previous section, one of the most important groups in Island Breeze was the Island Breeze Women’s Committee (Komiti). The Komiti are affiliated to various national women’s organisations, including the National Council of Women, the Samoa Women’s Development Committee Association (Komiti Tumama), and also to national church organizations (Sio, 2006) they have the ear of the Chiefly Council and have a strong influence in the community. Before I could do any observations or interviews I had to gain the trust of my participants by respectfully approaching them through the appropriate channels. To understand how the Komiti operated and what meanings they bring to their situations, or how they make meanings of activity in their naturalistic setting during the period of observation (Punch, 2009). I needed to be part of their meetings and occupy a place of observation. My selected setting was the Komiti’s monthly meeting. Given that I had arrived mid-way through the month, I aimed to attend the meeting at the end of the month. It was on my first Sunday in the village that I was given access to this setting. Sundays are a day for all families to attend church to worship, pray, and enjoy the Samoan tradition called toana’i, an impressive spread of traditional food and a time for the family to connect and relax at the end of the week. It was my first Sunday and I was anxious about meeting the ‘right’ people and get through the necessary protocols and meetings before I would be able to schedule interviews. The chief and his partner picked me up for church but could not stay with me because they were going into Apia for a combined Catholic service. Fortunately, the President of the Komiti was sitting on the front stoop waiting to be ushered into the building, signifying the commencement of the service. We were introduced and, as I expected, she asked where I was from and what my parents’ names are. She showed interest as I explained my lineage, and before she stood to enter the church she invited me to the next Komiti meeting to discuss my research.
2.5 Practical Issues in Participation Observation

Two practical issues regarding approaching your research site are problems of observation and recording. The researcher must select what is to be observed and why in reference to the research question (Punch, 2009). Gaining access to the setting may require some form of negotiation with the gatekeepers. The President of the Komiti acted as my gatekeeper because she out-ranked all the other female matai. Although I gained her invitation to the meeting quickly, making use of it was not straightforward. It required more in-depth research into the protocol and language used when attending the Komiti’s monthly meeting. Here is where we see how respecting the va that existed between myself and the hierarchy, and making use of the talanoa, worked in practise.

The aualuma are present at these formal meetings, which have been known to take a whole day. The other consistent times the women would meet were for the fale (house) lalaga (plait, weave), in which the weaving of mats is taught and encouraged. This is an informal weekly gathering for women of the village who are not in paid employment to learn about the ancient methods of weaving. This skill is practical, as families can enjoy the newly-made mats that adorn their house and mothers can teach new skills to their daughters, just as was done by previous generations. Each woman arrives at the fale with dried flax that they grow and prepare at home to begin or complete their mat. Attending the monthly meeting would be my first entry into the Komiti, and it was important for me to attend a less formal meeting to scope my selected setting. The fale lalaga provided a good opportunity for this.

Although this meeting would be less formal than the monthly meeting, there were protocols I needed to follow, especially because it would be my first meeting with the Komiti. I needed to respecting the va in deeds and actions. I had to organise a gift to take with me and I had to learn the protocol and dialogue to address each matai and the unranked women. When greeting a group of matai, one must acknowledge where their titles come from by mentioning the lineage of the village, called fa’alupega.
I sought the advice of a local volunteer at the Trust, Alofa, who advised me that the meeting was at 9am and suggested I take some food to contribute to the shared brunch. She recommended a breakfast type meal. I bought six loaves of brown bread, a block of butter, and two dozen eggs. Because I did not have any means of transport; Alofa delivered this to the President’s home the evening before the lalaga group was due to meet. Another part of the approach I needed to consider was how I would be dressed. Having a traditional Samoan puletasi was essential. It is a two piece garment and is considered formal wear. The top is usually designed like a blouse or a nice dress top with a matching sarong like skirt for the bottom half. The skirt is not sewn together but is made so it wraps around the waist and is fastened by long strips of material that are tied at the ends. The length and width of the skirt allows room for a woman to sit cross-legged on the floor and have her legs fully covered. Most fale have the normal furniture found in a Western house but they are not used during family time. During these meetings everyone sits cross-legged on the floor. A person cannot sit with their feet fully extended out towards others; this is a sign of disrespect. It is polite to sit cross-legged or have your legs curled up to the side. I felt that this encounter would be a good way to ‘ease’ into the setting before the main meeting. Although there was still protocol to adhere to, I felt less pressure knowing the fale lalaga was in essence a weaving class.

2.5.1 Gaining Access

On the morning of the fale lalaga, Alofa and I walked to the President’s home. I had toyed with the idea of wearing a sarong and a nice top that did not match but I didn’t because in my subconscious was my mother’s voice scolding me to wear a proper puletasi. The President’s home is a modern fale that is seamlessly attached to a Western-style house. The fale is the first point of entry for the visitors. As we approached, I could see the president and three other women already starting their weaving. The President looked up and beckoned me to come through the front of the house but I knew that I needed to go to through the side entrance because I am not ranked and I although am a guest in the village, my action of entering through the side gate, despite being invited to the front door, is a sign of respect and acknowledgement of her rank and that I understand my place in the village.
The President and the Vice President smiled at my sign of respect and insisted that I sit in the front of the fale with them. The beams of the fale indicate the rank and speaking rights of each matai, and the only two in the front of the house were the President and the Vice-President. The Vice-President is the wife to the second highest ranking matai in the village and also carries this authority. To refuse the invitation would have been rude and I proceeded to take my place between the two top female chiefs of the village. Alofa had followed me into the fale, but because she is unranked she remained seated in the back of the fale. She thanked the two matai’s for the opportunity to be part of the fale lalaga and was only there to introduce me to the weavers. She apologised that she had not been able to attend any meetings due to her employment with the Trust. Alofa then exited and left me with the matais and two other weavers who were wives of talking chiefs known as Tulafale, which meant they also had speaking rights.

Unstructured observation works hand in hand with talanoa because I could not predict or manipulate how the conversation would flow. Conversation only touched on my research when they asked me why I was living in the volunteer’s house. This question was immediately followed by who my parents are and what village they hail from. The President had already asked me these questions at our initial meeting at church, so she answered for me and explained that my great grandmother is from her childhood village and how she is connected to my family. The women were inquisitive and allowed me dialogue in English when I was not able to find the right Samoan word to explain something. They were clearly not interested in my research at this point, and I had to allow the conversation to take its own path. I spent three hours with the women answering their questions and talking about my life experiences with travel and church. It was a great time of bonding and breaking the ice. In the last half hour they began to ask about my research and inquired if I would be able to help teach computer use to the Komiti in between my research.
The President felt it would be a good trade-off for me to teach computer lessons while I worked with the Komiti for my research. I agreed that this exchange would be beneficial as the principle of participatory communication is one that empowers through structural change rather than behavioural change (Dutta, 2011), and it recognises that this is attainable through the active participation of citizens or stakeholders. Through observing the va between myself and the Komiti and applying the techniques of talanoa, I was given permission to interview the women of the village and had an opportunity to undertake participant observation through my computer lessons with the Komiti.

2.6 Collecting Data

My data collection was via participant observation, interviews, and a questionnaire that my interviewees completed before being interviewed. The questionnaire is separate from the interview process and provided an overview of the individual’s means of acquiring information and their habits of communication. The interview questions were themed around the mobile phone, tradition and culture, family and gender roles. My goal was to hold 30 interviews for my sample, which in total consisted of 26 participants, made up of 21 women and four men (two male youth and six female youth). I expand on the gender imbalance in section 2.7.3. Twenty-two interview participants came from Island Breeze and the other six were from Apia. During my final few weeks I had to cancel five interviews in Apia because I contracted the 1chikungunya virus that incapacitated me for 14 days. The interviews held at Island Breeze were all in Samoan and took between 120-150 minutes. My participants from Apia were confident English speakers and most interviews were less than 60 minutes.

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1 Viral disease transmitted to humans by infected mosquitoes. It causes fever and severe joint pain. Other symptoms include muscle pain, headache, nausea, fatigue and rash. Joint pain is often debilitating and can vary in duration. (WHO, 2015)
2.6.1 Participant Observation Groups

Outside of these interviews I used Participant Observation with groups (blue domes) and sub-groups (listed) of Island Breeze as indicated below.

**Island Breeze sub-groups:**

- Komiti Meetings
- Komiti Weaving sessions
- Komiti Computer Lessons
- Komiti biannual village inspections house by house
- Administration team (2 locals)
- Foreign Volunteers (3 staff)
- Project Staff (9 locals)
- Fale ata project 3 locals (Ethnographic Action Research)
- Monthly cleaning bee with Catholic Women’s Fellowship
- Member of the Samoan Christian Congregational Church

*Figure 3 Island Breeze sub-groups*

In my initial planning to gain entry to the Komiti, I decided against audio recording. It would be very disrespectful for me to have my Dictaphone out during the formalities and the general conversation. I decided I would write my field notes directly after the meeting. I had to gauge how the *ualuma* and the *faletua o sao* (Komiti President) received my request to attend/participate in their meetings before I could decide on my method of recording. The principles’ of *Talanoa* are very relevant to this context, and is worth repeating here for emphasis:

*Talanoa* is a good conversation: one listens to the other. When to speak and what one says depends upon what the other has to say. An open technique is employed, where the precise nature of questions has not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the *talanoa* develops. The *talanoa* will end when it loses its malie (enjoyment) or starts to revisit areas covered already, since then it is probable that no more new points will be added to those that have been co-constructed. It is a respectful, reciprocating interaction.

(Vaioleti 2006, pg.26)
I found in majority of my observations, I had to make short summaries on a notepad and Later, I detailed these in my field work journal. I found that my participants were very conscious of the recording device and either clammed up or acted unnaturally. However, in my one-on-one interviews, my participants were more comfortable with having the interview recorded than during group sessions. Throughout my research I kept a daily journal of my research activities. Most evenings were spent transferring the data collected from my note book to my fieldwork diary, which I kept on my laptop in a word document. I took photos using my research camera and my personal phone camera.

2.7 Interviews

The types of interviews I held over the course of my fieldwork were informal conversational interviews (unstructured) and standardised open-ended interviews (Patton, 2002). Informal conversational interviews occurred organically, and I credit their success to participant observation, because having a role in the community and working alongside my participants helped me to establish a good rapport. I used this method with the unranked women of the village because most of practical work was with this group. They were also more open to ‘casual’ conversation. When I observed the faletua o Sao (The President) the talanoa approach was most appropriate, but it left the direction of the conversation in their hands. I decided that my interaction with the faletua o sao was to primarily gain access to the Komiti and in any future dealings I would make observations, recording data in my notebook. I enjoyed the company of the faletua o Sao as it helped me grasp the role of hierarchy in the village; however, it was with the unranked women that I garnered some vital information.

One good example of participant observation is the time I assisted with the Catholic mothers’ cleaning bee. The group were meeting to clean the church and Alofa was rostered to clean the interior. We cleaned the church with a salu, the Samoan equivalent to a broom that is made from the dried stems of coconut palms. As I was cleaning, I remarked on something I saw on the church notice board, and this sparked a conversation between the two of us about religion and the conventional means of communication used in the church. In turn, this led to a discussion
that is now a chapter in my thesis regarding urban legends and mobile phones. I work with Alofa on a daily basis, but being in a different setting and not focused on her work duties allowed for some valuable bonding time and information-gathering.

The standardised open-ended interview was the best approach for my one-on-one interviews. My sample was the women from the Komiti, so in order to analyse any similarities or differences in responses to the same question(s) I needed a set of questions that I used for all my participants. Having the questions written ahead of time helped in another way: the interviews were conducted in Samoan and I was apprehensive about holding these interviews alone. In a later section about the limitations of my research, I discuss my early use of an interpreter and why this did not work. Having the standardised questions ready aided my confidence to interview in the Samoan language and develop further questions from their responses. I found that my efforts to hold the interviews in Samoan gave my participants a level of comfort and they were very open to clarifying anything that they were unsure about. It seemed that in their eyes my ‘weakness’ levelled the field, and as a result, it appeared to work in my favour. I found that, over time, I became more confident in interviewing in Samoan and was able to pick up similarities and differences during the interview rather than during a post-interview review.

2.7.1 Practical Issues of Interviewing

Preserving the anonymity of my interviewees was always going to be a delicate process. The most appropriate place to interview my participants was the spare room in the volunteer house. With people from the Trust working downstairs there was a steady flow of people coming in and out of the house, so participants were seen coming to the house. Questions would arise as to why they were with me and the participant would tell them they were being interviewed. I was able to establish privacy once the participants had arrived by locking the front door and using the room that was furthest from the front door, but even then I had interruptions from other house mates who would sometimes unlock the door and leave it open.
2.7.2 Lost in Translation

My first three interviews were conducted with an interpreter. I had built a good rapport with Alofa from the Trust office. She was really helpful to me in my initial entry to Island Breeze and seemed a good candidate to assist me with the interviews. Alofa has administration experience in New Zealand and Australia and has no problem transitioning between a Western and Samoan context. Her knowledge and enthusiasm to assist and give advice was welcome during my initial stages of research, but it became an impediment during the interviews. At the third interview it seemed she felt familiar with the script and process began to skip the questions that she felt were repetitive and added some of her own questions which were not helpful to my research. This incident brought to my attention the importance of the interpreter having a thorough understanding of the research aims, which at the time seemed like a risk because Alofa was not able to help me fulltime. Taking the time to train someone who may not be available when I needed them seemed counterproductive. In the end I was able to take back control of the interview and articulate my questions in the Samoan language which increased my confidence in conducting the interviews alone, which I did for the rest of my research.

2.7.3 Access to Males in the Village

A limitation to my research was not having access to the males in the village. In my initial research design I planned to interview a sample of 10 males aged 18-25 years and another of 10 males over 30 years old. I had some reservations about whether it would be culturally acceptable for an unmarried female to conduct these interviews. I was advised by the chief that it would not be a problem, but as mentioned before it was an unspoken taboo and I had to change tact and get access through the wives. Given the separate gender roles of the village (aumaga and aualuma) and how this seems to construct social activity in the village, I should not have been so optimistic to begin with. In the end I interviewed four males from Island Breeze and I was not given the opportunity to do any ethnography with the aumaga (men’s group). In Chapter 6, I further explore the themes of the gendered and social order of Island Breeze and how the mobile phone is used in this space.
In addition, I spent the final 4-5 weeks of fieldwork in Apia, the capital of Samoa. Apia has a population of 37,708 (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2014). People from rural areas who gain employment or are educated in Apia are considered successful. I stayed with my mother’s family in town, close to the hub, sports clubs, restaurants, cafés, and nightlife. My main goal was to interview people of position in government and the community, and the CEOs of the two main telecommunications providers, Bluesky Samoa and Digicel. My strategy was to use the snowball sampling method of gaining access to these groups through my connections: “This type of sampling technique works like chain referral. After observing the initial subject, the researcher asks for assistance from the subject to help identify people with a similar trait of interest” (Snowball Sampling 2015). The global saying that “It’s not what you know, but rather, who you know” is as relevant to Samoa as anywhere else, and shaped how I was able to connect and interview my participants in Apia. It helped that my connections were working in these areas or were related, and also that Samoa, being a small island, meant that there was always a possibility of ‘bumping’ into potential participants.

One example is when I tried several ways to connect with the CEO of Samoa’s first telecommunications provider, Bluesky Samoa (formerly Telekom Samoa). I had contacts who worked closely with the CEO and I had emailed his Personal Assistant several times, all to no avail. It happened that a friend of mine had invited me to participate in her church’s fitness programme. They were offering free, 60-minute aerobic sessions every Monday. My friend helped me connect with some of my participants and was aware of my desire to interview the CEO of Bluesky. My friend mentioned that he attended her church but thought he could be travelling as she had not seen him at a few services. We enter the church hall and my friend nudges me then points to a man in the corner of the hall and says, “He’s the CEO of Bluesky”. The CEO was planning to fly abroad for business the next day and was generous enough to answer a few questions after the fitness session.
2.8 Conclusion

My fieldwork site is unusual in that it is a village that has chosen the fa’amatatai system (indigenous rule) over the Western-style democratic rule demonstrated in most villages in urban Samoa. The fa’amatatai system influenced much of my research methods. The traditional nature of the site required my research to engage in ethnography that was culturally sensitive, taking into consideration the Pacific context that I was immersed in for seven of the eight months of my fieldwork. In order to find this balance I fused a Pacific methodology with traditional ethnography. The methodology I selected is called talanoa, also described as "the ancient practice of multi-level and multi-layered critical discussions and free conversations. It also includes the way that community, business and agency leaders receive information from the community, which they then use to make decisions about civil, church and national matters" (Vaioletti, 2006. pg.24). Talanoa worked simultaneously with va and enhanced the traditional methods of participatory observation, communicative ecology mapping, sampling and selection, and interviews. Together these helped me to forge culturally- and academically- appropriate research design.

The next consideration was the village context. It was important to approach my research site with appropriate cultural sensitivities and a balance of objectivity that helped me to keep my research ‘hat’ on. The insider-outsider phases I anticipated throughout my ethnography helped me to find this balance, although it was difficult at times since I felt torn between my two identities of being a Samoan and a researcher. My preparation for research went beyond the usual administrative and academic processes involved with research. Factors that needed to be taken into consideration had much to do with identity and understanding the community I was entering at a deeper level. The process of acceptance occurred in stages of understanding and familiarising myself with the protocols and the language. I went as far as removing visual barriers to building research relationships. This involved a change of hair colour from blonde to black. I changed my wardrobe from wearing shorts and mid length skirts to a full length ielavalava (sarong) and no singlets or clothing that showed my shoulders or bare arms. I minimised my makeup and jewellery to look plain and appropriate. For the most part, I was aware that I was being observed by the village to
‘test’ my Samoa-ness. The most important factor of my research design was using a framework that was inclusive and holistic: inclusive of the academic and cultural requirements required to give sound academic evidence using culturally appropriate methods, and holistic enough to encompass the idiosyncratic nature of my research site. I feel that the methods I selected were instrumental in uncovering a rich data and met these varied requirements.
3.0 Mobile Phones and the Changing Communicative Ecologies of Village Samoa

3.0.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how the mobile phone slots into a traditional village that mainly uses indigenous means of communication. It further 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 influences the space in-between (va). I argue that the mobile phone is not relied upon as much in rural Samoa as it is in settings that do not have fa’amatai and the Samoan concept of va. This chapter will also illustrate how village rules impede the place mobility of the mobile phone, further reducing its usage in the village. The mobile phone, like previous ICT ‘predecessors’ (radio, TV, landline), has a ‘place’ in the communicative ecology of the village. This is illustrated through communicative ecology mapping, a tool to gauge the use of indigenous and conventional means of communication (Tacchi, Slater & Hearn, 2003). It illustrates the richness of the communicative ecology of Island Breeze. Through communicative ecology mapping I have found the va to be a communication intermediary that is in keeping with Slater’s (2013) notion of communicative assemblages.

Mapping the communicative ecology of village Samoa requires understanding the environment and how the village operates. 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. 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. It invokes the question of how the mobile slots into the communicative ecology of village Samoa. Using empirical evidence from my research, I look at the ways in which communication structures time, space, and the flow of information in village Samoa before discussing the mobile phone’s limitations within the village’s structured means of communication and its place in this complex communicative ecology.

3.1 Communicative Ecologies

The concept of communicative ecologies was first used in Sri Lanka in a project that used Ethnographic Action Research (EAR), a method that was designed for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) initiatives by Slater, Lewis and Tacchi (2003). It draws on key ethnographic methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviews, and takes a multi-method approach (Tacchi, Slater & Hearn, 2003). EAR uses a participatory 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). The intent of this concept is for researchers to move away from studying the impact of ‘new media’ on a community and rather look at the “ways in which new media were entering the wider communicative processes of the locale” (Slater 2013, pg. 31). Moving away from examining the cause and effects of new media, this ethnographic investigation explores the ways that people construct stabilised modes of communicating and to start “asking what counts for them as media, communication, information and connection” (Slater 2013, pg.42). Based on this definition I would argue that the va as a stabilised part of village communication be included in any definition of communicative ecologies in Island Breeze.
3.1.1 Communicative Ecology Mapping

One way to describe communicative ecologies is as a web or network of information and communication that an individual or groups interact with on a daily basis. 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. 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 a niche of its own. More pertinent to my research was the question: how did the mobile phone support the space in between (va) during interactions? Does the individual addressability (Ling & Campbell 2008) of the device create conflict or negotiations for users when they are in Sphere 1 or 2 (see the va model on page 38) and what do these conventions look like?

The first interface was the types of communication used in the village. When identifying the different communicative media used in each sphere, I began with the village’s traditional means of communication and worked my way towards the information communication technologies used in the village. The village’s means of communicating include things like the wooden drum, the conch shell, and the 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 where decisions made at the top two levels are adhered to by all. One participant explained that Island Breeze was also known as a village with “one voice, e tasi le leο” (Intvw:06) translating the meaning in the Samoan language. It means that all villagers understood that the Chief Council made all of the rules, curfews and restrictions for the betterment of the village. The va brings all these elements together.

To map the nuanced communication in the village I observed people and took note of the types of village ‘noises’ that occurred throughout the day. I then explored the practical uses of village communication. This was then followed by further investigation over a casual chat with locals or during the scheduled interviews. I return to the church bell as an example because it 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 begin the 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 means of communication alerted the village to what time it was: regardless of whether you were a Catholic or not, you knew that it was 5:30am. This was the beginning of my observations of how village communication overrides the mobile phone and why phones are not used as much in the village as in urban settings. 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 the costs of 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. In order 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 I observed reflected the collectivism (Podsiadlowski & Fox, 2011) of fa‘asamo and further enhance the socio-metric wheel of the fa’amatatai system. The slow toll of the bell means that there has been a death in the village. The conch shell being blown at 6:30am 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.

This is discussed in depth in the next section, along with the place of the mobile phone in village communication. In this chapter I also examine debates regarding mobile phones in developing contexts to give a broad overview of the nuanced ways that the mobile phone has been perceived and used in other global contexts and how it compares to my research in village Samoa. Before concluding my analysis, I wish to draw attention to the importance for researchers to understand the contexts in which they are conducting their fieldwork, especially in measuring the impact of a medium in developing communities. As Slater (2013) 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 in order to understand its contribution (or lack thereof) in a specific social and economic context. To demonstrate the nuanced setting of a Samoan village, I return the focus to the concept of va as a code of conduct and a means of communicating. I add to this 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. 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.

3.2 Media Meanings in the Global South

Alongside communicative ecology mapping I adopted Slater’s approach of analysing “ways in which new media were entering the wider communicative processes of the locale” (Slater, 2013, pg. 31). At the time of this research I was not aware of the term ‘communicative assemblages’; however, as a Samoan who had lived in Samoa and understood the cultural context, I knew that ‘media’ was not a term that locals used when describing intermediaries encountered in sending a message. An example is when a person is sent to tell the pastor that the high chief needs him urgently and the pastor responds by calling the high chief on his mobile phone to acknowledge that he has received the message and is on his way. The usage of the phone might be classed as media but it excludes the messenger who notified the pastor to call the high chief. Moving away from examining the cause and effect of new media, this ethnographic investigation explores the ways that people construct stabilised ways of communicating and start “asking what counts for them as media, communication, information and connection” (Slater, 2013, pg.42). Samoans would not class the road on which the messenger travelled as something to include on a ‘media’ list, but because Pacific people view the road and sea as a further extension of themselves (Hau’ofa, 1994) these intermediaries are part of what make up communicative assemblages.

As Slater (2013) argues, researchers who assume the meaning of ‘media’ in a global north context (radio, television, internet, etc.) means the same in a global south context will ask questions that do not reflect the heterogeneous means of communication in the latter. When locals are not asked to identify what counts for them as media, the researchers end up with a picture of ‘home’ or the global north, rather than that of their research site. An important aspect of researching village Samoa has been an awareness of the nuanced indigenous communications media used in the village, which I achieved by spending time observing village life before holding individual
interviews. I had a template of questions from the EAR handbook that Tacchi, Slater & Hearn (2003) created for their Sri Lanka project. Although helpful, it was not relevant to what I had observed in the village. It soon became clear to me that it is an example of what Slater (2013) describes as “northern list of media that simply did not include what everyone knew commonsensically to be the key communicative assemblages in their lives” (pg.32). He continues, “Communicative ecologies do not contain media; they contain communicative assemblages which are “focused on the heterogeneous and skilled engineering of stable or routinized systems for accomplishing communication” (Slater, 2013, pg.46).

3.2.1 Localisation of Media in Island Breeze

Communication is mediated through communicative assemblages that involve people, technology, transport, roads, written messages, bells, mobile phones, ICTs, etc., that are used as means to communicate messages. The mobile phone enters a communicative ecology that engages “stable or routinized systems for accomplishing communication” (Slater, 2013, pg. 46) and, as in other developing contexts, creates its own ‘meaning’ and usage. In this thesis’s introduction I described how the mobile phone’s meanings differ across developing contexts and gave some of examples of these nuanced differences; for example, how a ring tone or a missed call can convey a message without the call being taken or a conversation held through the phone (Ling, Donner 2009, pg50-57). Lack of resources and finances has prompted these types of creativity in communication without verbal communication. The Jamaican practice of ‘link up’ (Horst and Miller 2006) and fa’asamo (the Samoan way of life) are similar in their immediate family connections (Horst and Miller 2006, pg.82), but the ways in which they use mobile phones are very different. The spread of gossip in Orange Valley via mobiles is different from Samoa’s own ‘coconut wireless’ (word of mouth). In Samoa, the use of intermediaries to take messages overrides the need for esoteric ring tones or missed calls. The Jamaican phenomenon of ‘link up’ differs to fa’asamo in that family connections are not made through land, but through blood ties and extended family. Samoans are also connected through cultural lands, which is why the village structure, fa’amatai, and va are key components of the foundation of village Samoa’s communicative ecologies.
The conch shell, bell, roads, face-to-face engagement, and the consciousness of the space in-between are premised on connection to the land and chiefly titles. The mobile phone slots into this network and becomes part of the communicative assemblages that accomplish the communication needs of village Samoans. Consistent public transport enables the inclusion of buses into the communicative assemblage, since messages are passed and goods are delivered via the driver for a small fee. This brief overview indicates the similarities of mobile usage in Island Breeze and other developing contexts with respect to both infrastructure and culture. The next sections provide empirical evidence of how the mobile phone has been integrated or localised in Island Breeze. I examine the intricacies of *va* and its influence on the use and non-use of mobile phones in the village’s communicative ecologies.

### 3.2.2 Text Message or Messenger

When I look up at bright sunny sky in village Samoa, my view is not inhibited by high rise buildings or apartments that require messy power cables or telephone lines to be functional. The village landscape is mostly natural flora. 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 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 gift for 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 hand written 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 (language 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 alerted me that despite the introduction of mobile phones to the Samoan market almost a decade ago, the uptake in the village has not occurred as quickly as it has in most urban settings including urban Samoa. As previously stated in Chapter 1, statistics show a significant increase in mobile purchases by rural customers. Regardless of this increase, however, the actual use of the device has not been as prominent, at least not in my research site where face-to-face communication is still preferred. The slow uptake is due to a combination of cultural, geographic, and economic factors and the principles of va, since most interactions require certain protocols to be followed for which, my participants state, mobile phone use is not appropriate. The close 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.

3.2.3 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. One of my participants, Laga, 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.

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.

Prior to the shop providing this service, the only landline in the village belonged to the high chief. The villagers recall having the landline in the mid to late 1970’s when they could use it for a small fee if the chief gave his permission. 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 they were to receive a call from overseas. This also left no room for privacy, but the only other alternative was a bus ride to Apia to the main telephone exchange or to receive a letter in the post.

Most phone calls from overseas were usually for a *faʻalavelave* (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 a mobile 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 such 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 of 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 affairs have all been ‘credited’ to the privacy of the mobile phone and its role in blurring the va between male and female relationships. I will address these issues further in Chapter 6. In the following sections, I first explore why the mobile phone holds less appeal for village Samoans.

3.2.4 Organising Time: Bells and Conch Shells

Most mobile phones come with features that enable the user to personalise their phone. One of these features is being able to assign different ring tones to their current contact list. An example could be the latest love song for a romantic connection or the conventional telephone ring for a family member such as a parent or sibling. Ling and Donner (2009) describe how users in developing nations have found creative ways to use the mobile phone in reaction to the limited resources available to them. Earlier in this thesis I presented one of their examples from Rwanda, which a customer and restaurant owner exchange missed calls to ascertain whether the restaurant has any food left for the customer. Pre-phone communications operate in a similar way in village Samoa: when the bell toll, the entire village understands its meaning.

In Island Breeze, church bells play a central role in notifying the community about upcoming events and activities. Within Island Breeze there are two churches in the village, one Catholic and one Christian Congregational. As previously explained, the Catholic church notified the village of the Prayer of the Angel and morning mass. In the early stages of my research I spent a lot of time with Alofa, the office administrator. She was often at the office by 7:00am. She had just come from morning mass so she would be in her church clothes. She often knocked on my door to change out of her church clothes and into her work clothes. Sometimes Alofa complained that the bell ringer had slept in and the first bell was very late and in turn made her late, indicating her reliance on village
communication as part of her routine. The bell ringer is usually an intern doing their practicum in the village for their final year of study at the Catholic Theological College on the other side of the island. Alofa knew the bell ringer because he used to work for the Trust prior to beginning his study. If the bell ringer was not available, someone from the Deacon’s family fulfilled their duty.

On Sunday mornings, the Christian Congregational Church sounds their bell at 8:00am to alert people that service starts in an hour. At 9:00am the bell is struck once to indicate that the service has commenced. This is repeated again at 3:30pm for the 4pm service. During the week the bell sounds at 6:00pm every day for evening prayer. Members will then have lotu (church, devotion) time with their families in their own homes. From Monday to Friday the sports field is occupied by the young men of the village in the afternoons. They assemble anytime between 4:30-5:00pm to play touch rugby for an hour. During the game they are very noisy and passionate in how they communicate. If you do not understand Samoan you would think that the noises are from a group of hysterical hyenas. Laughter and running commentaries fill the air for that hour, and then at 6:00pm the bell rings for evening prayers and suddenly there is silence. The field is cleared and everyone goes home for evening prayers. The bell ringer and the sports boys arriving home in time for devotion are classic examples of village coordination and of the villagers respecting the va by fulfilling their roles.

My participants did not see the point of using their phone as an alarm clock. The church bell alerted them to what the time was and the meanings of the bell sounds are interpreted by the time it rings and the rhythm. The 5:00am bell for the Agelu gives a steady one count in between beats and sounds 16 times. The 6:00am for the reminder for mass service has the same beat and also tolls 16 times. The Congregational Church bell toll has a quick tempo and is struck only three to four times at 6pm every day, signalling the time for family prayers. On Sundays the bell tolls eight times an hour before the morning and evening service. When there is a death in the village the bell tolls at a slower, sombre tempo that can last for 16-20 tolls or more. This alert of a death happens within the hour of the death occurring at any time of the day or night. Within 2 weeks of my arrival, I was woken at 3:00am by the
slow toll of the bell. On the same day, I heard it at 7:00am indicating another death, and a few weeks later there was another toll at 1:00am a few weeks after. I have no way of knowing which congregation is mourning a member until I ask the locals, but for those who are aware that one of their family members is ill, the bell toll constitutes an immediate communication to the deceased’s extended family. Phone calls or text messages requesting an urgent call back are made to families abroad and on island. In Samoa (as in other contexts) a phone call in the early hours of the morning is usually not good news. In these situations the majority of my participants place a high value on being able to be contacted by family and friends overseas or around Samoa. Texts or ‘please call me’ messages allow the sender to communicate with family without having to pay, and it is generally understood that family in diaspora cover the cost of calls as part of their support of this relational space. Prior to mobile phones, people would go to the house of someone who had a landline. One of the few male participants in my study, who previously held the position of pulenu’u (mayor) in the village, still has a landline and remembers being interrupted at odd hours of the morning for the use of his phone. He states that people still use the landline even though mobile phones are available, but not everyone owns one and people are open to sharing as this is part of nurturing the va or showing support. This is one reason why not everyone owns a mobile phone.

3.2.5 Conch Shells

The conch shell is another frequent and effective means of communicating in the village. The village council, comprised of male 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’s (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 to the mayor’s house, as many travel on foot. In reference to the va model, these meetings are located in Sphere 1, where mobiles and other technology are banned.
The July meeting 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 pusap 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 them 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 as a means to teu le va, that is, to ensure that the fa'amatai of the village is in order.

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

The women’s Komiti 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 8:30am. 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 is required to play their roles, and any absences are noted. Although there is no harsh penalty for absence, anyone who has missed a few meetings and does not have a ‘valid’ reason, such as employment or looking after the elderly or sick, are usually singled out at the next meeting or called to the faletua saá’s (high chief’s wife also the president) house for an explanation. I have found these scheduled meetings beneficial to my research, especially when trying to get the Komiti together or when I have not been able to connect with one of the villagers as are they are so often at these meetings. Further evidence of the non-use of mobile phones is attributed to conventions such as the “coconut wireless” and face-to-face communication.

3.3.1 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 about unusual 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 I attended the president and the next-ranked matai were giving advice to the women about raising teenagers. 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.

When addressing the high chief’s wife, 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 costs too much, and in any case, both of the head faletua o sa’o 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 traditional methods of communication over the mobile phone.

3.3.2 Face-to-Face Encounters

For most face-to-face encounters (especially with people of rank), upu fa’aloalo 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. When I first arrived, they would drop in unannounced because they were curious and wanted to know more about me and my background. Many visitors came with food, while others came with a gift in the form of an ie lava lava (sarong) that they had printed and designed. I would make some refreshments and my guest (s) would start the conversation by addressing me in respectful Samoan dialogue before explaining the reason for their visit.

Although our meetings were deemed informal, it is cultural practise for any visitor to follow a dialogue that is similar to the one I previously explained in which I was addressing the president of the komiti. The guest must acknowledge the host’s matai title if they hold one, and then they apologise for any imposition their visit may have caused. Then they mention that they have come for a specific purpose and request permission to discuss this with
the host. This is the host’s cue to accept their salutations and indicate that they may proceed with the discussion. I do not hold a matai title, therefore the dialogue is not as formal, but in a Western context, the acquaintance level I have with my visitors indicates that the conversation could have been held over the phone. It does not necessarily require a personal visit, however in village Samoa the nature of this conversation is deemed inappropriate to have over the phone. This is another indication of how traditional communication and formalities inhibits the frequency of mobile phone usage in village Samoa.

3.4 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 to 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.

### 3.5 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.p 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? The next
section seeks to answer these questions by presenting my findings around communication and movement in the village space.

3.5.1 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 existing primarily 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 hauled down anywhere en route, 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 came to Samoa, 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, Haitians 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 \textit{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.

3.5.2 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 has sometimes caught a taxi home after work. It is 1.5 kilometres from the Trust office to her house and costs $3.00\textit{SAT}. 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 \textit{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 \textit{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 matai’s 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. It was good timing because if I had missed this meeting I would have had to wait another four weeks before I could formally introduce myself and spend time researching and observing the women.

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 a text 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 inquires about this person’s business and information is exchanged.

3.6 The Changing Communicative Ecologies of Island Breeze

A key contention of this chapter is that in researching the impacts of media, one must consider the complexities of the environment that the technology has entered into. For this research, 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. Slater comments that placing certain mechanics under the “media” umbrella would probably suit project and funding criteria, but would overlook the richness of the unique setting. Although I was not aware of the term “communicative assemblages” prior to fieldwork, I understood that the road and a messenger was part of the communication process.

The term ‘communicative assemblages’ is not used in village Samoa, yet it is clearly relevant to the mechanisms of communication they practice everyday. 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. In writing this thesis, it is necessary for me to name things in order to describe the village, its hierarchical structure, and fa’amatai in which everyone has a social and cultural role to play in the running of the village. Terms like “coconut wireless” and my description of ways to nurture the va (such as upu fa’aloalo or words of respect, as processes of village communication) assist me in this process. It facilitates an appreciation of the socio-cultural context in which media, and/or the mobile phone are now located. This allows for an informed analysis and contribution to the broader context of the mobile phone literature.
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. The fa’amatai 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.

3.7 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 of the 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 back to the communicative assemblages usually engaged in accomplishing their communicative needs. Although the mobile phone has reached a decade in the Samoan market, it is not as evident in Island Breeze as the fa’amatai, a system of communication, va and its rich communicative ecology meets their communication needs.
The empirical evidence that I have so far laid out indicates that the communicative ecology of a Samoan village is complex and engages a myriad of communicative assemblages to accomplish its communication needs. Village communication is mediated through 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. My findings also indicate that although village communication is heavily reliant on indigenous means of communication, the mobile phone acts as an intermediary that makes up the communicative assemblages that meet the communication needs of the locals. 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 exist in the village’s stabilised and routinized system of communication.
4.0 The Moral Ambivalence of the Mobile Phone: Forbidden Connections and Secret Conversations in the Va

Lina seemed nervous when I asked whether the mobile phone made things ‘better’ for her family. A devout Jehovah’s Witness, she relayed the story of how the mobile phone ‘caused’ her 17-year-old daughter to fall pregnant out of wedlock. She was clearly embarrassed as she explained that their religious affiliations and raising her child under strict rules did not stop her daughter from falling into “temptation that started with the mobile phone.” Her daughter was fortunate enough to be accepted at a good high school in Apia (the capital) and moved to town to live with relatives. Due to the distance, Lina waived the rule of no mobile phones for her children until they work or attend university. Away from the restrictions of village life, her daughter got involved with a boy from the town area who initiated the relationship by getting her number. Aided by Digicel’s “Free Nights” promotions of free calls from 11:00pm-6:00am, their secret relationship blossomed. Within six months her daughter had fallen pregnant, and although she completed her senior year, she was unable to work as she waited to give birth. I pointed out to Lina that she refers to the mobile phone as the “cause” of her daughter’s predicament, to which she responded, “The mobile phone has a good and a bad side to it, but it depends on how people use it.”

So far this thesis has analysed the va in tangible contexts. Chapters 2 and 3 dealt with the relational aspects of va within the village hierarchy and structure.

This chapter discusses how the mobile phone has accelerated the process of ‘girl meets boy’ and how the fast tracking of a process in a traditional village and collective society can be seen to cause a moral panic. It discusses the moral ambivalence around the mobile phone and the tensions between the device and other values such as the feagaiga. The feagaiga is a code that reminds men to nurture the space in-between and be respectful toward their ‘sister.’ To make this argument I draw upon various terms in the mobile phone literature, including Lee’s (2004) concept of “presence,” Ito et al’s (2005) idea of “virtual space,” and Tjora’s (2011) “transparency layers to argue
that these terms assists “immoral” coordination to pass undetected and unmonitored by the usual rules that limit mobile usage in Island Breeze. My findings suggest that current cultural perceptions of the mobile phone in Samoa are that it has potential to facilitate the formation of inappropriate relations in obscurity, with consequences that impact family relations. My participants are aware that there is an intangible aspect to the mobile phone that aids in forming inappropriate relations, but they can only describe it through its negative consequences rather than identify it as a the same function that allows mediated conversations with family abroad or in the next village. To demonstrate the Samoan perception of co-presence as having a ‘dark’ side and how it is perceived in a Samoan context, I have named this ‘space’ va fa’a-pouliuli, which translates as a hidden or concealed space. The va fa’a-pouliuli not only reflects the mobile phone’s potential as the breeding space for immoral micro-coordination in this context (Lipset 2013), but also emphasises the nuances of conflict it creates in the va.

4.1 Mediated Spaces

To a certain degree and depending on costs etc, the mobile phone has eliminated the requirement for location or place to be a factor in connecting to someone and people are now connecting in the same communicative space (Miller and Sinanan, 2014), creating a feeling of presence (Lee, 2004). Having illuminated the relational properties of va and positioned it as the lens of this research, this section explores the ways in which mediated spaces compares in how they connect people, create community, and nurtures relationships with kin in diaspora. What exactly constitutes “presence” is contested across disciplines, each of which have their own terms to explain the phenomenon, including telepresence, virtual presence, mediated presence, and co-presence (Lee 2004). Although presence is related to a wide range of virtual experiences (Lee, 2004), here my literature review focuses on the virtual experience mediated via the mobile phone. Bulu (2012) discusses the different dimensions of presence in three categories: (place) presence, social presence and co-presence. Witmer and Singer (1998), define presence as the subjective experience of being in one place or environment, even when one is physically situated in another. Others describe presence as a kind of a ‘place’ (Lee 2004, Miller and Sinanan 2014, Bulu 2012). I examine
dimensions of presence (social and co-presence) in anticipation of examining how presence is mediated by the mobile phone and its influence on the va in Island Breeze.

Social presence is defined as “a psychological state in which virtual (para-authentic or artificial) social actors are experienced as actual social actors in either sensory or non-sensory ways.” (Lee, 2004, pg. 45). Social presence compares how humans interact (face-to-face) with different communication media and how they compare media with one another (Bulu, 2012). Lee states, “Social presence occurs when technology users do not notice the para-authenticity (virtual) of mediated humans and/or the artificiality of simulated nonhuman social actors” (ibid pg 45). This is experienced when using Skype or Facetime to connect and talk with others or when having ‘conversations’ via messaging applications (apps). Social presence differs from co-presence in that co-presence is described as the feeling of being in a virtual world with others or the sharing of space with other humans (Lee, 2004), which can be achieved face-to-face. This is otherwise known as off-line co-presence.

This thesis describes mediated spaces an intangible property of the mobile phone to make a distinct connection with the intangible properties of va. They both share an ambiguous quality that enables connection with others in another location. I previously described such a scenario using Kaili’s (2005) notion of va as socio-spatial, enabling connections with Tongans in Hawai’i through genealogy and land. Kaili (2005) travelled to Hawai’i and made these connections face-to-face. When it comes to fa’asamoa there are many occasions where malaga (travel) is required to teu le va (nuture the space in-between) as face-to-face communication and cultural protocols are part and parcel of maintaining harmony within family (aiga) and community.

Some could argue that the mobile phone has the advantage of being able to connect in a socio-spatial way remotely and without paying an airfare. This is an advantage my participants often pointed out. Their ability to stay connected with family abroad via the mobile phone was less expensive and a cost often absorbed by their ²well

²Participant’s assumption that anyone living in developed countries like New Zealand, Australia or the USA are doing well and can afford to absorb phone charges.
off’ relatives. The mobile phone’s ability to create immediate co-presence is something participants identified as being a great advantage because they were able to text family abroad or in other villages while continuing with the daily duties or having face-to-face conversations with friends or family. This notion of hybrid communication allows for conversations to occur at any time and in any location. The relationship between intimacy and technology has been a popular topic of discussion in academic literature, with case studies ranging from online relationships and friendships to immoral liaisons mediated via the mobile phone.

4.1.1 The *Va* and Co-presence

As previously discussed, co-presence is like being in a virtual world with others, the sharing of space with other humans (Lee, 2004), or the subjective experience of being in one place or environment, even when one is physically situated in another (Witmer and Singer, 1998). A study in Norway analyses how youth hold hybrid conversations (Tjora, 2011) in the virtual world, with off-line co-presence. The mobile phone creates a space within the *va* (space in-between) that has the potential to facilitate immoral coordination undetected and unmonitored. It has been demonstrated that “semi-synchronous communication” (Tjora, 2011.pg 194) occurs when face-to-face conversations are happening simultaneously with SMS conversations in the virtual space, that Tjora (2011) describes as “communicative transparency layers,” associated with front stage and back stage (Goffman, 1959). These theories suggest that there are two sides to a situation and that front-stage and outside space are what is presented to the public, while the inside space and backstage is hidden from the public eye. Tjora (2011) has connected these theories with the activities that occur in mediated spaces (backstage), juxtaposing them with activities occurring in face-to-face communication.

One example Tjora uses is the story of a female participant who explained how her best friend became her boyfriend. In the initial stages they decided to keep their attraction hidden until they were surer about their feelings, so they had to ‘act’ single when they were around friends. They used SMS to communicate. As one of the couple explain, “It was a secret that we had something going on at all, so we ended (up) using it (SMS) because it is
an easy and discreet way to communicate, so these talks went on alongside other communication going on” (Tjora, 2011.pg 199). While the mobile phone also blurred the lines between the public and private in a Samoan context, the va adds another dimension, since this hybrid communication blurs the lines between the tangible and intangible aspects of va. Does the anonymity of presence exempt it from being included in the va? How do Samoans describe mediated spaces in their own words? Is there an awareness of co-presence? It is pertinent to analyse how mediated presence influences behaviour in a Samoan context? The next sections investigate the relevance of va and feagaiga (covenant) in everyday village life, focusing particularly on the social gendered order.

4.1.2 Co-presence and Meaning in a Samoan Context

My interview participants identified the mobile phone as being good for keeping in contact with family members when they are away from the village or with those who live abroad. Mothers talked about the relief they have when they received a text from a child who is away in another village, advising that they were safe. The mobile phone aided in connecting a husband who works on the other side of the island with his wife and kids back in the village. It has been the conduit for friendships between youth who have left the village for work or higher education. These are the positive attributes my participants associate with the mobile phone and would not call it co-presence. They see this as a normal function of the mobile phone, but when discussing the moral panics associated with the device, they describe it as something separate that aids in this inappropriate behaviour, when in actual fact it is still co-presence.

When discussing the social issues surrounding the mobile phone, my participants believed that it is not the mobile phone itself that is the cause of problems, but the way the people are using it. It is only in these scenarios that the anonymity of co-presence is discussed, and it is referred to as hidden or secretive. My participants acknowledge that the privacy aspect of the mobile phone bestows some benefits, but they stated that not knowing what was being sent on the mobile phone and to who it was being sent has caused problems in families. In adopting Slater’s (2013) approach of understanding the localisation of media and the naming of what counts for them as media, I have placed co-presence (mediated spaces) in a Samoan context by naming it va fa’a-pouliuli or the hidden space.
My evidence indicates that my participants are only aware of the intangible properties of the mobile phone when discussing the moral panics linked to mobile phone usage.

The word faa-pouliuli can be broken down into parts, The causative prefix "fa'a" means “in the manner of” (Pawley 1966); “po” (in this context) literally means “night,” and uli means “black” or “dark,” with uliuli therefore meaning “very dark.” Other uses of pouliuli have been to describe a defacto couple living together without getting married, nofo fa’a-pouliuli (with “nofo” meaning “sit,” “stay,” “live”). The connotations of this term imply negative actions that are undertaken in secret or darkness. va fa’a-pouliuli. This reflects the negative consequences of individual addressability of the mobile phone. As I have explained throughout this thesis, this study examines mobile practises through the lens of the va, which is why I felt it was important to define the hidden space (va fa’apouliuli) as “the space in between the va.” It differentiates fa’apouliuli from previous descriptions aligning it with principles of va which are unique to the Pacific and identified strongly with fa’asamoa. The influence of va fa’apouliuli is illustrated through the following cases of youth discovering a ‘freedom’ that has led to rebellious acts that run counter culture to the collective nature of fa’asamoa and the values of va. To build the case of va fa’a-pouliuli in the va, the next section describes the gendered social order of village Samoa and the rules around relationship ideal. I then present narratives from my fieldwork of young girls finding their own sociality through creating a secret identity in the va fa’a-pouliuli, mediated through random conversations on the mobile phone. This behaviour points to the internet phenomenon of “catfishing”³ taking its own form via the mobile phone, which is an emerging issue in other Pacific contexts (Anderson 2013, Kraeme 2015)

4.2 The Gendered Social Order of Village Samoa

As described in Chapter 2, the social and cultural structures of Island Breeze are dependent on everyone fulfilling their roles. This includes the matai (chiefs), fono (village council), and the groups separated by gender, a women’s

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³ The phenomenon of internet predators that fabricate online identities and entire social circles to trick people into emotional/romantic relationships (over a long period of time). The term catfishing was inspired by the 2010 documentary "Catfish." http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Catfishing
village and the men’s village (Stewart-Withers, 2011). In the village setting a woman operates within one of three social groups that give her status. The *faletua* and *tausi* (heads), the *ausaluma* (women from the village), and *ava a taulele’a* (married into the village) have all come together under the *Komiti Tumama* or Health Committees, which were formed in the early 1930s under the New Zealand administration. These *komitis* are affiliated to national women’s organisations such as the National Council of Women and the Samoa Women’s Development Committee Association (Komiti Tumama). They are also associated with national church organisations (Sio, 2006). They have the ear of the chiefly council and exert a strong influence in the community. The men’s village or group are the *taulele’a* or *aumaga*, and are referred to as *malosi o le nu’u*, which literally means “the strength of the village.” The *aumaga*’s primary role is to serve the village council faithfully by implementing and enforcing its decisions. They provide assistance to the families of the village when in need, mainly in the form of labour. The provision of food is also one of the priorities of the *aumaga* and is the main reason why young Samoan men are engaged in farming and fishing activities on a daily basis (Fairbairn-Dunlop 1998).

Despite the separate roles of these groups, gendered roles are pliable. It is not uncommon for males to cook or for women to work in the plantation. Females can also have chiefly titles and entitlement to land. Although it is true that males have more ‘freedom’ than the females generally, curfews placed on females are restricted to a certain age group. After meeting certain requirements (working or university), some allowances are made (such as receiving a mobile phone) and restrictions are reduced or done away with. To a certain degree there are no restrictions on the career decisions and life choices for women. Those whose employment takes them to the city or the neighbouring resorts are still part of the *komiti* and women of the *ausaluma* have the freedom to attend meetings when they have the time (or are summoned by the leading *matai*). In most villages, the *feagaiga* covenant has caused restrictions on courting within the village as it is generally believed that those born and raised in the village are ‘family,’ which means potential partners are sought outside the village. This is not to say that
marriage type relationships have not happened between two people from the same village. Before the invention of the mobile phone and despite the threat of penalties, these relationships existed.

One couple from Island Breeze broke this rule and the punishment for the female was a demotion to the lowest rank in the komiti, while the husband faced penalties delivered through the aumaga. Other cases involving infidelity have resulted in couples being banished from the village. Some of these involved church ministers: one of my research participants relayed a story of a Pastor from another rural village having an affair with a woman who was also married. The affair ensued after a series of church meetings where the woman was involved in administration duties. There are also reports of incestuous relationships between fathers and their daughters or uncles and their nieces. These inappropriate relations are believed to be linked to Samoa’s previous belief in the aitu being the offspring of incestuous relationships (Schoeffel et al, 1987) and is something that occurs today but is taboo and swept under the carpet. Other romantic relationships were initiated in public spaces, such as in transit to town on a bus or taxi, while waiting at the bus depot, or during evening socials held by neighbouring villages. Messages were passed between friends and secret rendezvous occurred under the blanket of the night sky. These ‘liaisons’ occurred despite barriers of remoteness, lack of (adequate) telecommunications such as landlines, and more importantly, before the arrival of mobile phones.

The socio-metric wheel that orders the social and cultural structure of a Samoan village was designed to ensure villagers fulfilled their roles and followed cultural protocols and village rules. Although village duties and responsibilities are straightforward, the rules around appropriate male and female relations were more of a challenge as the last few accounts have shown that, even with the ‘best’ systems in place, human nature prevails and rules will be broken. The fact that these banned relationships were discovered when they were in full bloom indicates the task of policing this activity would have been difficult. This suggests that Samoan male and female relations have always had the potential to creep into ‘grey’ areas of what is acceptable and unacceptable in Samoan society. The potential for illicit sexual liaisons in small communities (or anywhere for that matter) predates
technology and the arrival of the mobile phone. The *feagaiga* is the ideal of male and female relationships in *fa’asamoa*. It is successfully upheld by many but, as indicated here, is failed by others. The next step in this analysis is finding out how the mobile phone influences the *va* between male and female relations in a Samoan context. I consider this question by presenting empirical evidence from my fieldwork and some key literature on how mobile phones influence gender roles and behaviour towards the opposite sex in other island contexts.

4.3 Free Nights

Horst and Miller’s (2006) research on telecommunications in Jamaica found that the landline gave women control over the use of phones and how they ran the household. Mobile phones enabled individual ownership and control of calls, disrupting the power dynamics in the family. Unlike mobile phones, landlines are fixed to an abode, which means that one point of access can be easily monitored. The individual addressability (Ling, 2004) of the mobile phone caused the disruption to this power structure (Horst and Miller, 2006) by giving access to people to make and receive calls outside of the home and without anybody knowing. Island Breeze had few landlines and public payphones, but as in Jamaica, the arrival of new means of telecommunications (the mobile phone) disrupted the power to oversee phone use. Secret liaisons can occur without supervision, as has been the case with youth using Digicel’s ‘Free Nights’ promotion without their parents knowledge.

The promotion offers free mobile calls to other Digicel numbers between 11:00pm to 6:00am, so long as they make a call from their mobile phone for more than three minutes during the day. Some of my research participants met this criterion by texting their friends, family members (local and abroad) and ‘sponsors’ (see 4.4.1) to top up their mobile credit to make a call. My participants contended that these “free nights” have a negative social impact causing undesirable events such as young girls getting pregnant or running away with their boyfriends. Horst and Miller’s (2006) study found that one of the most common forms of networking revolved around the potential of sexual relations. The concept of “Jamaican link-up” is potentially similar to the concept of Digicel’s ‘Free Nights’. Although Jamaican link-up is slang for meeting up with friends or connecting with loved ones, the mobile phone is
extending the parameters of where new relationships are formed and creating relationship issues for young men and women (Horst and Miller 2006). As in Samoa, Lipset’s (2013) study in Papua New Guinea found that people are aware of the potential the mobile phone provides for these liaisons to occur more frequently and under the ‘radar’.

An example of this in Samoa is my participant’s sibling who had a relationship without the family knowing. The younger sibling acquired a phone from the new ‘friend’ and kept it hidden from the family. They would stay up all night talking on the Digicel free nights promotion, connecting and eventually plotting to run away together. The family discovered this when the sibling went missing. As a result, the sibling was sent to live with relatives in another country.

The mobile phone’s networked society has the potential to connect all consumers, whether they know each other or not. This is illustrated best through a phenomenon occurring in Samoa and other Pacific islands (Andersen 2013, Taylor 2015, Watson et al 2016) in which consumers (usually males) call random numbers. Conversations between strangers of the opposite sex ensue, and from there, illicit sexual relations occur. One participant who volunteers as a peer mentor at a local health clinic explains her encounter with a young girl who fell pregnant on account of the random dialling phenomenon:

“When this young couple they came in and they didn’t know each other but the girl got pregnant because they said they met on free night. The girl fell in love with the guy because she didn’t even know this guy but the guy has a wife and kids. So when this girl got pregnant she came down and looked for help and she told us the story that this pregnancy happened from free night some people just dial numbers and when they hear if a guy is dialling a number and they hear a girl is answering so they just... That’s what I mean, free nights is causing a lot of impacts and disadvantages to young people’s life”

(Intvw01 personal communication, 2013)
Taylor’s (2015) ethnography in rural Vanuatu found illicit sexual relations to be a consequence of the rapid introduction of the mobile phone. The random calling phenomenon occurs in Vanuatu, which the locals refer to as “pull a girl” by making a “mistake on a call” (Taylor, 2015 pg.11). Once it is established that the number belongs to a female, the number is passed around to other males and then they go out to “serava... the secretive practice of young men going in search of sexual liaisons at night” (Taylor, 2015 pg.12). Empirical evidence from my fieldwork suggests that this practice of random calling has extended to the Internet phenomenon of ‘catfishing’ via smartphones. “Catfish” is an American term presented as a verb, “Cat- fish,” to describe a person who uses online media to masquerade as someone else with the intent of duping someone to fall in love with them (Daily Mail, 2014). In the American context, this usually involves social media and dating sites. Samoa’s version of catfishing does not rely on social media or dating sites, but via direct phone calls to random numbers. The Catfisher is looking to start a conversation with a female. He (it is not known if this is also a female practice) falsely states that he thought he called his relative’s number and then starts to make small talk, pretending to be someone they are not, in the hope of building a rapport with the victim.

There is no term given to this kind of behaviour as it is very new to Samoa, but many are aware that it happens and the closest term that people feel best describes this behaviour is the Samoan word for deception or to dupe, faʻāse’e (Fa-ha sey-heh). The flip side to Samoa’s version of catfishing is the reverse effect, where the alleged victims use the random caller to ‘sponsor’ their mobile phone activity. This practise is seen in Papua New Guinea where it has been given the name, phone friends (Andersen 2013) but women in PNG are cautious when excessive ‘sponsorship’ (topping up of phone credit, receiving money or goods) occurs as physical punishment from boyfriends, husbands, or both occurs when phone friends are discovered. For my participants, keeping random callers a secret was a welcome reprieve from the strict rules of village life. Turning the tables on the callers’ game by having a pseudonym or secret identity provided an agency that was restricted by family expectations and rural living.
4.4 Agency and Identity

Life in rural Samoa can be viewed as idyllic, with its eco-friendly environment, beautiful sea views, beaches, and abundance of fresh fruit and vegetation. However the island nation’s remote location and lack of employment opportunities are limitations to economic stability. Remoteness is a big factor as the schools that offer better scholarships and access to the national university are mostly in the capital, Apia. The best employment opportunities are also located there, and leisure activities such as movies, night clubs and cafés a stone’s throw away in comparison to a two-three hour bus ride to town from Island Breeze. Some argue that it is less expensive to live in village Samoa, but travelling to the capital requires money. If staying with relatives in Apia, a gift of food or supplies is given as a token of respect and visitors will also have to contribute to their upkeep during their stay. While village life is perceived as less taxing on the pocket, some argue the limitations of rural living is a cost in itself, especially for the youth. In Western societies, adolescence is a time of self-discovery and expression of self, “an identity which is separate and autonomous from given social relationships, such as families, neighbourhoods and communities” (Horst and Hjorth, 2013, pg. 15); however, in fa’ásamoa the collective culture supersedes individualism. How do rural youth establish their identity outside of these given social relationships? In Island Breeze, youth are expected to wear a school uniform during the day and outside of school adhere to the village dress code. On Sundays everyone is expected to wear all white. Often, how one spends one’s time is dictated by the toll of a bell or the sound of the conch shell. The mobile phone could provide a degree of individualization of identity through the personalization of digital items and environments (Horst & Hjorth 2013). The practises of updating a Facebook status, customising a ringtone, or changing a screensaver on one’s phone are all examples of media personalisation. These are now an everyday practice for users worldwide. Consumers identify with a brand or lifestyle, creating an intimate relationship with a consumer item, and “such practices transform objects into signifiers of identity and/or even transform the objects into part of the self” (Horst & Hjorth, 2013. pg 14). The mobile phone defies the physical limitations that the landline could not traverse. Often, video chats or Skype calls are almost as good as talking to someone in person. Text messages and emails replace hand-written letters without
any delay in receiving and sending them. The benefits of modern technology are extensive but, however ubiquitous mobile phones may appear, access to these benefits is limited by the monetary and other costs required maintain them and use them. Consumers who have the money to buy ‘flash’ phones and data so they can go online can benefit from the smartphones’ many features, but for most rural youth a lack of finances and limited understanding of how to fully utilize their phones are real barriers. How then, is the mobile phone a signifier of identity for these youth? In contrast to Horst and Hjorth’s findings (2013), my participants were not aware of how to activate the ‘bells and whistles’ on their phone. My participants expressed the extent of their knowledge was an awareness of the difference between a touch screen phone and the old Nokia dial pad phones.

Smartphones were a novelty and often a gift from visiting relatives. The few that owned one were not familiar with how to use Facebook and usually only allowed to use it under the supervision on an older sibling, and even then, logging in and status updates were done through that sibling. Nonetheless, the mobile does provide a sense of independence and identity for youth, especially teenage girls and young women who live under the strict rules of the village and family life. The females I encountered aged between 17-23 years of age weren’t allowed a phone unless their parents permitted it. The majority of the youth received a mobile phone from family overseas. This created problems for families who were already strapped for cash, only allowing their teenager to take the phone on the provision that any credit top-up would be from the relative that bought the phone. Most of the 17-18-year-old girls who had phones were monitored by an older sibling or had their phones taken off them at night time. Parents also controlled their teenager’s phone by not supplying them with money to top up their phone. Despite these rigid rules, these young women still found a way to top up their phone by creating separate identities and relationships from those that surround them on a daily basis. My participants would give a false name and lead the caller on to believe there was genuine interest so the caller would top up their phone credit as a way of keeping the ‘relationship’ going. Apart from the usual connections with friends and family, I have found that young women seem to find a sense of identity and independence by secretly connecting with other mobile users. However, much
like Kraemer’s (2015) discovery of females in urban Vanuatu who have defined their own sociality by making secret rendezvous via the mobile phone, I found that rather than being ‘catfished’, young Samoan women are generally keeping these random liaisons to ‘sponsor’ or top up their phones.

4.4.1 “Lafo Mai Se Credit” (Send Me Some Credit): Top-Up Requests Via ‘Sponsors’

‘Tai’ is only twenty-two years of age and volunteers at the local school. She shares of an experience that occurred when she was in her final year at high school. Tai was catfished by a man who had contacted her by ‘accident.’ This soon turned into regular phone calls in which the man would flirt and offer her mobile phone credit. Tai was already seeing someone without her parents’ consent. This random caller soon became her ‘sponsor,’ a term loosely used for someone who pays for whatever you want to keep you interested. For Tai it was just fun and games. She never spoke to him for very long, and most of the conversations were around her meeting him. She enjoyed the mystery and the attention. Tai is no wallflower and is a very attractive girl who would not be short of attention from males. I asked her if she had considered the risks of leading on a stranger and having them pay for phone credit. She replied that she understands the danger of it all now, but at the time she felt that it was something she could keep to herself. It was ‘fun,’ a reprieve from the monotony of village life and her parent’s rules. It all came to a head when Tai agreed to meet her ‘sponsor’ at the markets in Apia. She made up a story to her family about a school trip and caught the bus with a girl friend to Apia. Tai remembers texting her sponsor. She was nervous and scared, yet excited. She was not sure what to expect, but the guy sounded genuine and caring. She was even conflicted about her ‘real life’ boyfriend, wondering what she would do if her sponsor was someone she could have an actual relationship with. Her text read, “I will be at the market in 5 minutes.” He replied immediately, asking what she was wearing so he could easily identify her. She lied to him, saying that she had on a yellow dress. He eagerly responded with a full description of what he was wearing and where he would be waiting. Tai and her friend went to the area that her sponsor was waiting and she was horrified to find out the man with whom she had been flirting and romantic over for the past few months was old enough to be her father.
Tai and her friend fled the market place, laughing and scoffing at same time. Tai deleted his number and ignored his calls as he continued to wait for her. She eventually had no choice but to change her SIM card.

I have spoken to a few female teens who have had very similar experiences. Some provide details similar to Tai’s story; others are proud to say they caught onto the caller’s ‘game’ and threatened them with the police. Thankfully, none have fallen prey to anything drastic. Similarly, Andersen (2013) research in PNG of a woman from Ialibu left her husband and kids and travelled across country and ocean to meet with a school boy who tricked her into believing they would be together if she came to his village. At the realisation of being tricked, the woman was distraught that she was in unknown territory with no wantok (kin or close friend). She admitted to pursuing this phone friend because she was upset with her husband who was in “big trouble. All the trees around the house, he cut them down. All the pigs, the house...ruined. Papa went to the Highlander [Hotel in Mt. Hagen] and did all sorts of bad things “(ibid, pg.324). Her mediated ‘relationship’ provided an avenue to avenge her husband’s bad behaviour. The phone friend was the woman’s way of escaping her reality; perhaps she thought the grass was greener on the other side. My participant, Tai, was also in a ‘real’ relationship that she kept secret from her family, and also hid the existence of her sponsor from her family and her boyfriend. Phone friends and sponsors illustrate the second dimension of presence, social presence where “virtual social actors are experienced as actual social actors in either sensory or non-sensory ways.” (Lee 2004.pg.45).

Neither Tai nor the woman from PNG took into consideration that their relationships were conducted in an intangible space through the mobile phone and therefore not ‘real’ according to local definitions. Lee (2004) further describes this behaviour as when “users do not notice the para-authenticity (virtual) of mediated humans and/or the artificiality of simulated nonhuman social actors” (ibid, pg. 45).

In another scenario, Malia’s random caller was someone who was looking to use people. She wanted to turn the tables on them. Malia is a pretty Samoan girl, and although she is quietly spoken she exudes confidence. The eighteen-year-old was given a phone by her aunty in New Zealand, a Blackberry phone with internet capability, but she didn’t know how to go online. When I asked her about her contact list she said they were mainly guys she
met at interschool sports competitions or when she was visiting family in other villages. These ‘friends’ usually provided her with phone credit and always invited her to meet them, but she was not allowed to have a boyfriend. If her family found out about the boys she was liaising with on her mobile, it would be confiscated. Malia was advised by her older sister about catfish callers. She was thankful that her sister had warned her about these men, because when she did get a random call she was able to identify the nature of the call and, rather than becoming caught up in their game, use them as a sponsor for her credit. Malia found that the mobile phone has opened a new world for her, one that she is not too proud of. She had started to steal money from her parents to buy credit when her sponsors are not responding. Malia sees it all as harmless; she knows that she will never go to see any of her male friends, and certainly not the sponsor. She felt a little bit guilty about stealing $2.00 tala for credit but she says it hardly ever happens. She also admits that, since having the mobile phone, her behaviour has been discreet and devious, something that she is surprised about. Nevertheless, she enjoyed having pseudonym personalities as it is different from her ‘normal’ life. Malia seems to understand that she is living a different life via the mobile phone and compares it to her ‘normal life.’

She states that she feels guilty for stealing from her family and yet feels there is no risk being involved with these sponsors because to her it is harmless. She believes that nobody will find out about what she does on her phone because her parents do not understand how to use it and they trust her. Both Malia and Tai come from strict families, are part of the church choir, and present themselves good, innocent, and honest young girls (something their parents work hard to preserve.). Both girls state that if their parents found out about the kind of phone activity they have been involved in, they would receive harsh discipline and lose their phones. One expressed that she might be sent away to an even more remote village as punishment. Now that Tai is older and has graduated from teachers’ college she enjoys a little more freedom, but still keeps her boyfriend a secret. Malia continues to play her role in the family. She turns up to prayer meeting on time and abides by the house rules of switching the phone off at night time, although she always finds a way to sneak her phone to school or into her room for a late night call.
Here we see how the mobile phone is opening up another ‘world’ for these girls and aids in the discovering of a separate identity from the aiga (family). The restrictions placed on females in the fa’asamoa certainly make the individual addressability (Ling and Campbell, 2008) of the mobile phone appealing and has disrupted the flow of ‘power’ dynamics in the household. Horst and Miller (2006) found in their research around mobile phones in Jamaica that with the landline, women ran the household and gave women control over the use of phones. They found that mobile phones which enabled individual ownership and control of calls disrupted the power dynamics in the family. The focus here is power dynamics and the transition of authority from the collective to the individual.

Before the invention of mobile phones, not many households owned a landline, and any communication with family members came via either the mother or father during family meetings. The only time a person had privacy away from family was either at school or at work. The individual addressability of the mobile phone provides an agency for these girls to have privacy while still participating in the collective activity of village life. How does this activity affect the va? Has social presence placed a rift in the va between these girls and their families? Are activities in va fa’a-pouliuli an exception to the va principles because it is hidden?

4.5 Discussion

Prior to the mobile phone’s existence, and despite the relationship ideal of feagaiga, premarital sex and teenage pregnancies and adultery were an issue in Samoan society. However, the addition of the mobile phone has accelerated the process of ‘boy meets girl.’ The mobile phone’s ability to traverse time and space, and to mediate secret liaisons, has seen an increase in courting, illicit sexual behaviour, and inappropriate relationships. This section discusses va fa’a-pouliuli in which these liaisons occur before analysing the role that the va plays in these ‘relationships’ between the Samoans in these scenarios. For the adult men, where was the nurturing of the covenant between a Samoan male and his sister? What about the girls and their relationships with their parents? Their rebellion violates the va fealoaloa’i, the space between all relationships that encourages unity and harmony and, like all values, is nurtured within the aiga and nu’u (family and village) How do these secret mediated liaisons
differ from the secret courtships that existed before the mobile phone? It is not that the natures of these liaisons are different, but rather that the mobile phone has accelerated this mediated practice, and this is causing a moral panic. The anonymity of these interactions being mediated through a device that allows easy access to anyone, anywhere, is a new phenomenon in Samoa. This chapter asks whether the *va* has been influenced and changed, even though they occur in the *va fa’a-pouliuli*.

Given the evidence, can we say that the mobile phone is changing the *va* between male and female relationships? It has certainly played a role in changing circumstances for my participants. Malia did not decide one morning that she would start to steal from her parents to feed her mobile fetish, and Lina’s daughter did not intend on having a child while unmarried and at high school. In these scenarios, has the *feagaiga*, covenant between a Samoan male and female, been broken? I argue that it has, because respect is not subject to an environment or visibility. It is a principal that shapes character. But does that mean the *va* has been changed? My observation of the empirical evidence leads me to suggest that the way the *va* is influenced is subjective and varied. Not everyone has chosen to maintain harmonious relations with one another once an offence has entered the *va*. One female participant, Loni (pseudonym), had a disagreement with the *Komiti* and rather than accept the fine for her violation (seen as nurturing the *va*), she opted to leave the women’s group and be excluded from future gatherings. The opportunity for this woman to *teu le va* with the *Komiti* is always available and is left to her to do at a time she feels it is appropriate. The majority of my participants from Island Breeze (all part of the *Komiti*) followed the village rules and would often cite incidents in which they would respect the *va* between the hierarchy and comply with village rules despite their personal feelings.

In other scenarios cited in this chapter, violation of the *va* has resulted in consequences ranging from a behavioural change to a complete lifestyle change, but despite these outcomes the *va* remains intact. Any liaison that occurs in the *va fa’a-pouliuli* are hidden and secretive, which means that they do not align with the principles of *va* which reflect honour, respect, and harmony. *Va fa’a-pouliuli* occurs in a space that is foreign to these principles, limiting its influence to the confines of this mediated space; however, because the consequences of these secret liaisons
are ‘lived’ out in real life they become subject to the principles of va. Here we see why the hidden space is defined as the space between the va. These practises in va fa’a-pouliuli have major influence on the va fealoaloa’i and the feagaiga, but do not change the va per se. Rather, they expose the values of va and illustrates its longevity in fa’asamo.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter explored whether the moral ambivalence of the mobile phone changes the relationship va of Samoan male and females. This question arises due to reports of promiscuous behaviour occurring among Samoan youth and adults, mediated through random calling and text messages that violate the feagaiga between a brother and his ‘sister.’ The evidence provided indicates that these inappropriate relationships were mediated via co-presence which this research identifies as a layer of undetected space that does not allow the structures of the fa’amatai system to operate. The va that Samoans believe to have been present since the beginning of creation (Tui Atua, 2009) is described as a spirual and relational space devoid of technology therefore, prior to this research, co-presence did not exist in this space.Samoans describe positive benefits of co-presence as a property of the mobile phone. Being able to connect with family across distances as though they were in the same space has been identified as the main benefit of the mobile phone, but they discuss social issues such as teenage pregnancies solicited through the device as something separate and sinister. Although other literature describes the consequences of co-presence in developing contexts, none have specifically defined this space with respect to the cultural context in which these activities occur. Because my research question is concerned with the Samoan concept of va, a space understood to be tangible and intangible, it has been necessary to name this space va fa’a-pouliuli or the hidden space to reflect current cultural perceptions on this mobile-related activity. The va fa’apouliuli has negative connotations of inappropriate things done in secret or darkness. The va fa’a-pouliulis’ intangibility and obscurity has the most influence on the va.
5.0 Text Messages from the Grave: The Mobile Phone and the *Va Tapiuia*

5.01 Introduction

This chapter discusses the intangible aspect of *va tapuia* and how the mobile phone becomes part of this ancient rhetoric. I argue that mobile phone practises in rural Samoa are absorbed by the *va tapuia* because, as described by Tui Atua (2009), the intangible properties of *va* absorb different phenomena. As a result, the *va* has transcended the many transitions of ancient Samoa to the independent and modern nation it is today. I explore how the mobile phone has influenced the concept of *va* as a sacred space and how respecting the *va* between the present and the after-world is highly regarded in Samoan culture. I review academic literature on Samoa’s polytheist beliefs that existed before missionaries brought Christianity to the island, thus bringing the context of an ancient belief to our understanding of the modern and Christian nation that Samoa is today. It explores how the ancient lineage of the *aitu* (Demigod) is deeply engraved in the way Samoa was ruled and its influence on leadership. This is contrasted with the way the *aitu* (ahh-ee-too) is portrayed in modern Samoa as a predominant feature in urban legends. Focusing upon *aitu* text messaging, I examine how Samoan mythology and religion intersects with contemporary social issue around order and respect among youth in Samoa.

5.02 Cleaning and Meaningful Conversations

Early in my fieldwork, when I was thinking of ways to become more integrated with the villagers, I stumbled across an urban legend that helped me to shape my thinking around creating this chapter. It was a Saturday morning and I was contemplating which public areas in the village I could linger to get a feel for local activity. As I mulled this over while eating breakfast, my thoughts were interrupted by Alofa and her nine-year-old daughter. They had come to invite me to the Catholic women’s cleaning bee.
She was explaining that the mother’s group often clean the church on Saturday mornings. She had come to see me early (8:00am) because she had some errands to run that afternoon. She felt that this roster was a real inconvenience as Saturday is the only time that husbands or other relatives are home to do the chores around the house, freeing the women to go into town for shopping and do other errands. She said many women will leave the village on the 6am bus and endure the two- to three-hour bus ride to town in order to be back at 5pm and go straight to church to fulfil their cleaning duty. Her description of this rushed journey implied that the authorities disapprove when a person is not able to fulfil their rostered duties. Not knowing she had answered my quest for the morning, Alofa and I set off towards the church, crossing the rugby field, passing the fresh water spring and travelling along the seawall. The dense heat made swimming seem a better use of time than cleaning, but within ten minutes we had arrived at the church.

The Catholic church is on the shoreline and is the last occupied building at the end of the road. The buildings beyond it were ruined in the tsunami of 2009. Concrete foundations and broken structures lie amidst overgrown grass and fallen coconut trees. As we neared the church, its white and blue colours stood out, diverting one’s attention from the ruins to the quaint church building with a seating capacity for 200-250 people. The signature statue of the Virgin Mary stood in front of a modest veranda. Upon entry, one is confronted with a kaleidoscope of colours from the stained glass windows facing the entrance. A crucifix with Jesus is evident, as are the many symbols associated with Catholicism. Other notable props are the church organ, a wooden stand for the priest, and two wooden chairs with silk covered cushions, presumably for the deacon and the priest. Alofa’s task for the day was to sweep the floor, so we set about our duties using the salu, a broom made with coconut fibre. As we cleaned we had conversations about communication and the use of mobile phones in the church.
She said that not everyone owned a mobile and the church had a notice board that locals could check to find out about the church events held during the month. People were used to this as the notice board was in place prior to mobile phones and it didn’t cost them anything to find out information.

Our conversation led to the way that messages were communicated through folklore in ancient Samoa, a time where spirit beings or the *aitu* ruled the earth. I was curious about the urban legends[^4] I used to hear about as a child and wondered if there were any stories floating around involving the *aitu* and mobile phones. Alofa looked at me quite seriously and said, “there has been an incident with mobile phones.” We sat down and she proceeded to tell me about how the *aitu* is unhappy with youth being on ‘free nights,’ a Digicel promotion that offers customers free calls to any mobile from 11pm to 6am, provided they have used at least 3 minutes on a mobile call before 6pm. The offer permitted conversations among youth to occur without parental supervision, as the offer is from late at night until dawn. Alofa described the social impact of these promotions as including young girls getting pregnant or running away with their boyfriends. She added that it has also been detrimental to students’ ability to perform at school, since after being awake all night they lack energy and concentration. Further discussion on the impact of ‘free nights’ on the *va* is covered in detail in chapter six.

### 5.1 The Night Belongs to the *Aitu*

The legend begins at the annual Catholic conference. This week-long event invites ministers and families from all over Samoa to stay on campus and participate in the conference, which includes guest speakers during the day and some evening sessions. Many of the religious denominations in Samoa hold these annual conferences as a means of bonding and encouraging their ministers and members of the different branches. A teenage boy was put in

[^4]: Defined in this thesis as ancient myths (not restricted to urban areas) presented as a modern story with little or no supporting evidence that spreads spontaneously in varying forms and often has elements of humour, moralizing, or horror. [http://www.dictionary.com/browse/urban--legend](http://www.dictionary.com/browse/urban--legend)
charge of babysitting the minister’s children. So the story goes, the babysitter was always on his mobile phone, making use of the ‘free nights’ throughout the conference and not paying much attention to the kids.

One night while on ‘duty’ he reported that he heard noises that sounded like someone was walking behind the house. It was a simple two-bedroom house situated behind the main hall, close to the bush. These houses are used to accommodate guests and conference attendees throughout the year. Upon hearing the noise, the sitter went to investigate and saw two men over seven feet tall walking through the yam plantation. The boy hid behind a tree and watched as the two men walked past his hiding spot. As they reached his hideout, he reported suddenly going blind and feeling like someone or something picked him up by the heels. He reported dangling upside down, suspended in the air, and was carried a few metres before he was suddenly dropped to the ground. He was found unconscious with foam around his mouth, and he awoke to familiar faces from the conference looking at him with deep concern. He had been dropped outside the main hall where the conference was.

It was not long after he woke that he phone received a text message on his phone in the Samoan language that translated to, ‘You think you can take over the night? What about us?’ I asked Alofa who sent this text and she said it was the *aitu*. As this story circulated, parents began warning their children of the *aitu’s* unhappiness with their night time activity on mobile phones. They cautioned them to not be awake all through the night talking or texting because night time belongs to the *aitu* and if they were caught ‘taking’ their ‘territory’ the same thing would happen to them.

This conference was held in 2012 and the free nights’ promotion had started around this time. I asked Alofa if she believed that this event took place or if it was a ploy adults used to scare their children into obeying the rules. Alofa responded that she believed the event happened, and although it can be seen as a way to control children, she and many Samoans believe that the *aitu* are real. Considering Samoans traditionally use stories to communicate a moral, for many these legends are nothing out of the ordinary. Alofa was quite convinced this event actually took place. For locals it is no surprise that Samoa’s legends now include mobile phones. However, as a researcher
observing the mobile’s influence on the space in-between, the ancient custom of storytelling is juxtaposed with a sophisticated piece of technology that, according to Alofa, was being used by the aitu to send text messages to the living. This raises questions as to why Samoan’s believe that a ghost character from a Samoan ancient myth uses a mobile phone to warn against staying up late at night. Other encounters have made national newspaper headlines, such as alleged reports of ghosts appearing in pictures taken through mobile phone cameras. My participants had mixed feelings about the existence of ghosts or the aitu. Some acknowledged that they were part of Samoan mythology; others only recognise the God that they worship on Sunday. For the latter, the aitu were either demons or hearsay. This fusion of mythology and technology raised questions regarding the effects of mobile phones on the va tapuias. How did the inclusion of the mobile phone in the aitu rhetoric shape the way Samoans’ relate to the sacred space? This next sections looks at ancient Samoa and the predominant worship of the aitu, which, although not practiced today; still ‘haunts’ modern-day Samoans who continue to spread the legacy of the aitu.

5.2 Ancient Samoa

The legends of Samoa illustrate a belief that crossing over from the spirit world to the modern using technology is possible. This intriguing claim raises questions about why Samoa’s ancient belief in non-human gods, Atua (ahh-too-a) and those of human origin (Aitu) still influences behaviour today and the mobile phone’s role in the va tapuias’ influence on the modern and material world. I seek to answer these questions by reviewing the literature on the ancient myths and legends of Samoa, especially with regard to the spirit world’s extensive influence on chieftain leadership in gaining favour in battle and the wisdom to lead. I consider the contradiction that Samoans still believe in the aitu amid the ‘heavy’ cloak of Christianity and religion that envelopes the nation today. The history of these myths and legends, and Samoa’s conversion to Christianity, is further juxtaposed against the inclusion of the mobile phone in ‘modern’ folk tales or urban legends. It brings context to the empirical evidence from my fieldwork that indicates the aitu are using mobile phones to communicate with the living. I will then examine mobile phones and spirituality in other developing contexts to bring a broader perspective to the topic and aid in my final analysis.
5.2.1 The Va Tapui
The *va tapuia* is defined as sacred spaces of relational arrangements. *Tapu* is a Polynesian word that means sacred or taboo. For Samoans, *tapu* indicates something that is subject to certain restrictions because it has a sacred essence that Samoans believe reinforces their connection or relationship with all things, gods, cosmos, environment, and self. The *va tapuia* refers to the *space between* man and all things living and dead.

Samoa’s Head of State and Pacific scholar, His Excellency Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Efi, says of the *va tapuia*:

It implies that in our relations with all things, living and dead there exists a sacred essence, a life force beyond human reckoning. The distinction here between what is living and what is dead is premised not so much on whether a life force, that is, a mauli or fatu manava, exists in the thing (that is, whether a life breath or heartbeat exudes from it), but whether that thing, living or dead, has a genealogy (in an evolutionary sense rather than in terms of human procreation) that connects to a life force. In the Samoan indigenous religion all matter, whether human, water, animal, plant and the biosphere are issues of Tagaloaalelagi. They are divine creations connected by genealogy.

(Tui Atua, 2009)

This is the space that my research investigates. I compare literature on ancient Samoa to other modern contexts that discuss the spiritual realm and technology in order to find out how the mobile phone impacts the *va tapuia*.

5.2.2 The Origins of Samoa
Understanding ancient Samoa has required dual research in pre-historical evidence and the oral traditions of stories, poems, and songs passed on by word of mouth. The first writings about the origins of Samoan people were produced by early Anglican missionaries between 1840 and 1870. In 1892, more translations from Samoan to English were published from the original (Meleisea, Schoeffel, Sio, Tavale, Fitisemanu, 1987). These writings describe how Samoa was created by the god *Tagaloa-fa’atupunu’u*, meaning “creator” or “tagaloalelagi” (God of the sky) who dwelt in the expanse at a time that there was no sky or earth. Tagaloa used his environment to create
the earth, sea, sky, people, and other gods (Meleisea et al, 1987). It is the fundamental belief of Samoans that they did not migrate from South East Asia but are the original people of Samoa. This belief helps us to understand how much influence the spirit realm continues to have on Samoans today.

5.2.3 O Le Aitu
Before Christianity came to the Pacific, Samoans were polytheist, believing in more than one god. Early missionaries to the Pacific deemed Samoa a godless nation as there was no physical evidence of temples of worship or buildings that supported the idea of congregational worship. In fact, Samoans believed in two main categories of gods: the non-human gods, Atua (ahh-too-a), and those of human origin, half men/half gods, called Aitu. The aitu are believed to be the spirits of loved ones who have passed away and dwell in the spirit underworld (pulotu) but return among the living to exert their influence either negatively or positively. As polytheists, Samoans worshipped these ancestral aitu by demonstrating respect through actions and applying sanctity to many aspects of life. They believed that sacred events, influenced by the spirit of their ancestors, occurred everywhere and in everyday life. Early writings of the aitu indicate that its lineage is deeply engraved in the ways that ancient Samoa was ruled and how it is ruled today.

The village structures that have been explained in earlier chapters are currently governed by the village council and the Samoan government, but in ancient Samoa each village revered different gods. In the early 1800s, villages were known for their political and godhead alliances. Early writings by missionaries indicate that political-religious power is the basis of Samoan history. One of the most powerful gods was Nafanua, the goddess of war. Nafanua was the child of Saveasiuleo, the spirit that rules the spirit underworld. He is half man, half eel. His wife, Tilafaiga, was his niece, the daughter of his sister. Many aitu were believed to be the result of incest, and such aitu were considered to be more powerful than their ancestors. Nafanua received more power because she was miscarried, or was alu’alu toto (a blood clot) and was buried, but emerged in the form of an adult woman. She was hence given the name Nafanua, “hidden in the earth.” Her reputation as goddess of war prompted high chiefs in different areas to
pay homage to her in return for victory *Nafanua* was known to take possession of high chiefs and, through her control, would lead the chief and the village to a victorious battle (Schoeffel and Gavan, 1987).

*Aitu* were believed to belong to the family line. Offerings were given to these gods as a way for Samoans to call upon the *aitu* for their favour in battle. As Schmidt describes them, “The *aitu* were powerful and dreaded beings who must be appeased by offerings” (Schmidt, 2002, p.g 5) A chief by the name of *Tamafaiga* was possessed by *Nafanua* and became so powerful that villagers began bringing gifts and offerings to him as a form of worship.

*Tamafaiga* was given the status ‘living god,’ Samoans believed the *aitu* belonged to a ‘mirror world’ because they were able to transition between the after world and the living world. Many chiefs were afraid of being punished by the *aitu* who, although they lived in the underworld, could appear in the material world to punish misconduct. As well as these godheads, Samoans believed in a great number and diversity of spirits. There was the spirit of the rainbow, boatbuilding, fishing, war, trees, nature, etc.: a god for almost every aspect of daily life. Samoans would seek the favour of the godhead of these specific activities, such as the god of fishing when they would set out to fish. The history of Samoans’ belief in *va tapuia* and how they nurture their relationships with the *aitu* lends understanding to the legends circulating in Samoa today. Despite Samoa’s declaration of ‘Fa’avae ile Atua,’ that ‘Samoa is founded on God’. Schmidt (2002) argues that ‘God’ could be spelled with a small ‘g,’ acknowledging the origins and foundation of Samoa through the *aitu*. So how did the god of the *papalagi* or white foreigners come to Samoa and how did the ‘new’ god’s influence spread rapidly throughout Samoa to be known as the God that Samoa is founded on? Through the writings of the missionaries in Samoa in the early 1800s we see the influence of the *aitu* at work even in the spreading of the gospel and the continued practise of having leadership in the village or government submitted to godhead.

### 5.2.4 One God, One Nation

The arrival of missionaries from the Anglican London Missionary Society (LMS) in 1830 signalled the arrival of Christianity to Samoa. Samoans’ belief that each leader required a spirit godhead to gain power meant that any high chief seeking to have any political strength needed to have a spirit godhead to worship. One high chief named
Malietoa is etched in Samoa’s history as the first Samoan to be converted to Christianity. It is believed that Nafanua herself had prophesied that Malietoa’s godhead would come from heaven, “e tali le lagi l i lou malo” (Schmidt 2002, pg. 126), and so when John Williams and the first missionaries were received by Malietoa at Sapapali’i, a village on the island of Savai’i, it was seen as the fulfilment of this prophecy. Malietoa’s alliance with the missionaries gave religious legitimisation to his new regime. According to Schmidt (2002), this alliance was more political than religious, and the rapid spread of Christianity through Samoa came through gaining political alliances with other chief and territories. The London Missionaries Society (LMS) offered to teach coverts to read and write and would have teachers from Rarotonga at their service. Early missionaries state that Malietoa insisted that all teachers from other islands coming to assist the work of LMS were to be brought to him first for approval, and any chiefs who wanted to be converted were required to apply to him. One missionary is quoted as saying: “We plainly saw the drift of this reasoning. It was to give him a kind of supremacy over all the islands” (Schmidt 2002, p.g.131).

Malietoa’s strategy to gain political power through the missionaries was reinforced as more Samoans converted to Christianity. The new faith was called ‘lotu,’ meaning “church” or “devotion.” Samoans began to convert when they saw immediate results from the new god. People who were sick were healed and then converted. Missionaries challenged the tapu (taboo) on certain rules in the village, such as not eating from a cursed tree as death would follow. LMS attendants ate the fruit without consequence, thus challenging the local belief system and resulting in the lifting of the taboo. As a result, more conversions occurred, and eventually the shrines of worship were destroyed and temples of worship were erected in their place. However, it is said that deity worship still continued despite people’s conversion to Christianity as Samoans would choose who to worship. As in many other places around the world - this persistence of local gods is very common.

Churches have become a central part of Samoan society. The three most influential churches are the Methodist church, the London Missionary Society (LMS), and the Roman Catholic Church. The Methodist church began its ministry in 1828, two years before the London Missionary Society (LMS), who are known today as the
Congregational Church of Samoa (CCCS). The Roman Catholic Church was the last of the three to arrive, establishing its presence in Apia in 1845. The early work of these mainstream churches has ensured that they remain the largest denominations in Samoa. Just like the leaders of ancient Samoa believed that their power comes from submission to a godhead, the churches in Samoa play a central role in the social, political, and economic life of Samoa. Many national politicians, civil servants, and senior matai are officeholders in churches. Officially, the conversion from a polytheistic religion to a monotheistic one was completed by 1850; however, there is still a widespread belief among Samoans today that religion came to Samoa through Nafanua’s prophecy, which gave the new religion its power to eventually rule Samoa (Schoeffel & Gavan, 1987). The belief that Samoa was founded through the Atua Tagaloa-fa’atupunu’u is a rhetoric that frames Samoa’s history and continues to shape the world view of most Samoans (Meleisea, 1987). It is in understanding the history of ancient Samoa that brings context to claims that the aitu continues to give guidance and warnings, even to the point of texting from the after world through the mobile phone, and why these alleged accounts with the underworld are not taken lightly in Samoan culture (Schoeffel & Gavan, 1987).

5.3 Media and the Unknown

Media has also contributed to the circulation of stories and legends. Television, for example, helped people to push the boundaries of the tangible and intangible, particularly through themes of fantasy science fiction, the occult, and the unexplained. The relationship between media and spiritualism dates back to the nineteenth century, where the first type of technology used to communicate with the dead was the telegraph. Sconce’s (2000) work haunting and the media, tracks the history of the association of old and new media with paranormal and spiritual phenomena in American culture. The book attempts to unravel some of the mysteries around humans’ fascination with television, science-fiction, and unexplained paranormal activity. Sconce (2000) asks why, after 150 years of electronic communication, people still ascribe to “mystical powers to ultimately very material technologies?” (Sconce, 2000, p.g.6).
The narratives are presented in a way that almost categorizes each phenomenon as the explained and the unexplainable. Its accounts range from legends of ghosts inhabiting televisions, stories of alien conquest through media, and attempts to contact the dead through telegraphy. Sconce proposes that all media, from telegraph, radio to the television, and computers have a “living presence” that has the potential to connect us with other territories outside the natural human senses. As Sconce notes, “Fantasy narratives and human-interest stories allow us to consider that those realms might include the spirit world and other planets. It is through these more outlandish tales that Sconce helps us see the same governing ideas in more ordinary media” (Sconce, 2000, pg 6). The spectrum that Sconce covers illustrates the fascination that humans have with technology and its connection with unexplained presences. The next section discusses the connections people are making with paranormal phenomena and religion through the mobile phone.

5.3.1 Mobile Phones and the Unknown

The concept of spirit beings from the underworld texting a living being to deliver a warning may seem bizarre, but in other contexts the idea of using the mobile phone as a communicative tool for spiritual connection is not unusual. One example of mobile phones and spirituality comes from the Philippines. In 2001 it was once hailed as the ‘texting capital’ of the world, the Philippines were known to have at least 10 million mobile phones transmitting 100 million message a day (Roman, 2006). By 2001, SMS communication had become part of the Filipino lifestyle, and was part of a strategy to overthrow the government of the time circulating the iconic text message “We Are Generation Txt” (Rheingold 2002, p.g 20) that drew a million supporters of the “People Power II” revolt against President Estrada of the Phillipines (Rheingold 2002, p.g 20). Almost a decade later (2010) there were 65 million mobile phone subscribers in population of 90 million (Pertierra, 2013).

Pertierra’s (2013) research looks at how the internet and mobile phones were changing the communication landscape in the Philippines, “even relationships with the recently dead are being affected by this technology” (Pertierra, 2013, p.g 19). Pertierra’s (2013) analysis of “mobiles and the internet as technologies of
mediation” (Pertierra, 2013, p.27) presents case studies that provide context of how Filipinos are making new friends via the internet and mobile phones, the internet facilitating online marriages and receiving “texts from the grave” (Pertierra, 2013, p.32). A passenger ferry carrying 116 passengers caught fire and sunk an hour after leaving the shores of Manila. There were no survivors. An investigation into the incident reports that family members claiming to have received texts messages from their deceased loved ones, sometime after the ship had caught fire and sunk. A hairdresser believes her regular customer sent her two missed calls to advise he would not make his regular appointment (common way to communicate). When the hairdresser was advised her client died the day before, she believed he was letting her know what had happened to him from the grave. Although Pertierra (2013) did not delve into this case study, it was used to illustrate the way that Filipinos’ are thinking of new technologies and the way in which it mediates transnational relationships and access to ‘worlds’ beyond the local.

Religion plays a significant social role in the Philippines, and it has the largest Catholic population in Asia (Roman, 2006). In 2002, the Catholic Church began to adopt the SMS phenomenon to send spiritual messages to their parishioners. Religious messages are sent on prominent religious celebrations such as Easter, Christmas, and Mother’s and Father’s day. Subscribers state they are not always sure who sends these messages, as not all are from their church. Some people believe the messages are sent from their mobile provider. Other messages received are chain letters or prayer requests in exchange for miracles. Another attempt to ‘evangelise’ through the phone was a project sponsored by a multinational firm that provided a “religious chatroom” for subscribers to receive counselling and encouragement; however, this was soon discontinued as some users sought sexual gratification rather than religious education. Visitors began seeking romantic and sexual partners through the service rather than moral teachings. As a result, other services emerged where messages were sent without any interaction with the subscriber (Roman, 2006).
Such ‘push technology’ only allows the receiver to receive the message, and although in some cases they are able to respond, they can only do so directly to the mobile provider and usually for marketing purposes. Push technology is widely used as a marketing tactic by many companies. It is not unusual to receive a non-reply message from a mobile provider, bank, or gym to advertise or inform them of their services. The key factor in these scenarios is that these messages are sent through a business, a person, or a service. In cases where recipients believe a message was sent from the underworld, their interpretation is tied up with local cultural beliefs. The association of mobile phones with the paranormal is by no means limited to “developing” contexts. In 2001, one newspaper headline in the United Kingdom claimed, ‘Cell Phones Scare Away British Ghosts’. The article states that a tourist destination known for ‘regular’ ghost sightings had seen a decline in paranormal visitors since mobile phones were introduced (Goode, 2001). It reported that a researcher from the Society for Psychical Research claimed that the use of cell phones increases the “electric noise generated by cell phones drowns out other unusual electronic activity,” namely ghost sightings (Goode 2001.Pg 4) The case of ghosts in the United Kingdom varies significantly from the Samoan case. In the former, it is believed that mobile phones disrupt the ability of ghosts to manifest, but in Samoa, it is believed that the spirit beings the existed before humans and retain the powers to manipulate circumstances to push their agenda, even to the point of warning humans against using technology in certain ways. Samoans’ account of paranormal activity or encounters with the aitu are perceived by some as part of Samoan history and by others as superstition. What other occurrences have Samoans experienced with the aitu, and how does the mobile phone impact the average Samoan’s relationship with the va tapuiā? In the following section I present vignettes of my participant’s encounters with the aitu, mobile phones, including random appearances of aitu in images taken with mobile phones.
5.4 Urban Legends from the Field

5.4.1 The Aitu in the Billboard

In 2013, Samoa’s main newspaper, *The Samoa Observer*, reported an apparition appearing on a billboard in a village located fourteen kilometres from the city. The paper’s online platform reported (Ugapo, 2013), the village of *Afega* had erected a billboard in the centre of the village that promoted good village relations, sponsored by the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCS). The front page story reported that the image on the billboard is of the village council and the apparition is described a “sad looking woman.” The apparition initially began appearing behind the group of people; however, the report states that she moves around the billboard: “At one point it is sitting on the lap of one matai,” this viewer explains, “in the next it is sitting in front of another matai, and soon afterwards it is perching on the shoulder of another matai.” Spectators have called the “sad woman” an *aitu* and some claim that although they cannot see her with the naked eye they were able to see her through the lens of a camera or camera phone. People speculated that the *aitu* appeared in response to some internal politics causing division in the village. Afega was at that time reviewing the village rule book and members of the village who have seen the *aitu*’s image claimed that the *aitu* was angry about the changes, stipulating that things from the past should not be “messed with” (Ugapo, 2013). The Mayor of the village was forthright in stating that he suspected the editor of the Samoa Observer, Savea, made up the story, since he and his family had been banished from the village. When questioned by a reporter (Ugapo, 2013) the Mayor refuted this version of events, assuring the reporter that the villagers were not divided over anything, and were in fact in agreement to review the village rules. His hypothesis regarding the image was that the billboard had been recycled and the apparition was simply a mark from its previous use. The Mayor continued to maintain that he did not believe this was an *aitu* and that he did not believe in ghosts. Only three people commented on the article in *The Samoa Observer*, but their comments more or less summarize the range of opinions that I came across during my fieldwork:
“#3 John 2013-03-19 12:35 This is like a movie...very interesting, and if it true, this means our ancestors are watching our every move everyday...something to think about...and the lesson here is...don't change the foundation that started in every villages. Its best to keep it that way, or someone might get mad”

“#2 Tasi 2013-03-19 12:09 For a country that is founded of God, i'm surprised many of them actually believe this apparitions (in reference to the many people filling up my facebook news feed about it), and for those that don't already know, on your phones there is actually an app that can photo edit and add the "Ghost Effect" ”

“#1 Petelo 2013-03-19 10:10 All villages have issues at one time or another. Afega is no different. However, this aitu on the billboard would make for a great story for the next 5Tulafale movie. Send 6Leopao Saili to converse with the billboard lol”

(Ugapo, 2013)

Two weeks after the article was published a rival newspaper, the Savali, reported that The Samoa Observer had doctored the pictures using a ghost effect application found on most smartphones. Savali interviewed the CEO of the company that created the billboard and rebutted the Mayor’s allegation that the billboard was recycled. The CEO advised that digital images could only be used on clean sheets, and when the editor of the Samoa Observer was asked for his view, his response was “no comment” (Tavita, 2013)

This particular article was cited by my interview participants, but their recollections are different from what the article stated when it was published two years previously. When I asked my participants if they heard of any recent aitu stories, one participant mentioned that the aitu lives in the billboard that is advertising mobile phones. They

5 The Orator (O Le Tulafale) the first Samoan language film shot in Samoa with a Samoan cast and crew.

6 Leopao Saili is the main character in The Orator
cited the same village as mentioned in the newspaper, but they were not sure what image was on the billboard.

Their story is that the villagers became aware of the *aitu* when some men who were drunk and acting disorderly in front of the billboard were confronted by the *aitu*. My participant could not remember the details, only that the *aitu* scared them sober. Another account describes the same village and the same group of drunken men, but this participant’s account was that the *aitu* was angry at the lack of respect shown so the group of drunken men were all murdered by the *aitu*. Again, the details were sparse and they did not read about it in the paper or hear it through the news, but through people of the village that were there at that time.

5.4.2 *Aitu* Calling My Mobile Phone

Loretta is a 35 year old full-time mother of two children who runs a small business selling vegetables from her home garden. She attends the local Christian Congregational Church, belongs to the Mother’s Fellowship Group, and is a believer in Jesus Christ. Loretta did not complete high school and got married in her late twenties. When asked about her perspective on the *aitu* and the urban legends that exist about it, she advised that she used to believe that *aitus* existed but since becoming a Christian she no longer believes in them. I explained to Loretta about the incident with the boy at the Catholic conference who received a text message from the *aitu*. Loretta then opened up about a phone call she personally received from the *aitu*. She said it happened in the early hours of the morning, between 1-3am. Loretta woke when her phone started ringing. She checked the number and saw it was blank. I asked her if it said “private number” and she responded no, it was a blank screen. She did not want to answer the call but it kept ringing and ringing and it seemed if she did not answer it would wake up the household. So Loretta answered it and when she said “hello,” the reply on the other side was not a human voice but a high pitched electronic sound like one would hear when the television was not picking up the signal and it went grey and “fuzzy,” making a lost transmission noise. Loretta became afraid and hung up the phone. She believed that it was the *aitu* trying to tell her something but she didn’t think about that phone call until her mother became ill later that week. Her mother lives in another village and Loretta believes the *aitu* was warning her to go and see her mother. Another participant, Fale, explained to me how her grandparents watch over her and guide her, even
though their graves lie in the backyard of the main house. Her story begins one year prior to our conversation, at a
time she was studying for her high school senior year exams.

“It was a typical week night and my duty after school was to do my chores and help prepare the dinner. We
had family prayer before dinner and then I would relax while my other siblings cleaned up. My final duty for
the evening was to make supper of tea and pancakes for my parents. After this I would then turn to my
school books and because it was exam time I decided to work late into the night. I did my school work in the
faleo’o (traditional Samoan house) where I and my siblings slept as it was cooler than the main Western
styled house. I used a kerosene lamp because everyone was asleep so I couldn’t turn on the main light. The
faleo’o is near the graves of my grandmother and grandfather and although it has been a number of years
since their passing I always feel like they are ‘watching’ me, I always feel their presence. On this night I
really believe they were watching me because as I was studying, I always felt I needed to look over the
graves. It was the latest I had ever stayed up working into the night, I started to feel afraid. I remembered
all the stories of the aitu from my childhood and I although it made me more afraid I had to keep working
because the exam was only a few days away. It was 2:50 am and I was only halfway through my revision, my
eyes were getting sleepy and I kept drifting off to sleep. All of a sudden, a brisk breeze filled the faleo’o
disturbing what was a still quiet night. I felt a chill up my spine as the kerosene light was snuffed out. I did
not hesitate to end my study. I jumped up from my seat and somehow found my blanket on the fala (flax
mat) and hid under it hoping that the aitu or the spirit of my grandparents would not scold me for staying
up so late”.

When Fale explained this to her parents they scolded her for staying up so late, especially on a school night, but
they had mixed responses as to whether the kerosene lamp was snuffed out by the spirit of her grandparents or by
nature. Fale’s father is religious and does not believe in the aitu or that spirits of deceased will hover over their
loved ones. He said that, given the late hour, perhaps Fale’s tiredness caused her to imagine things. Her mother, on
the other hand, is very superstitious and believes that her parents were watching over their granddaughter, making sure she would get enough rest for school the next day. Fale sides with her mother as she has always felt her grandparents’ presence in the wee small hours before dawn.

5.5 The Mobile Phone and the Va Tapuia

In understanding how the mobile phone influences the va tapuia, this chapter has looked at the history of Samoan mythology, the introduction of Christianity, and other intersections of technology with the spiritual realm. Based upon the legends and interpretations of my participants, I suggest that, despite the mobile phone becoming part of the aitu rhetoric, its influence on the va tapuia has been minimal. I make my argument based on the ancient belief that Samoans originated from the work of the god, Tagaloa-fa’atupunu’u the creator, and the definition of va tapuia as being the space between man and all things living and dead. (Anae, 2010). These beliefs persist despite the penetration of Christianity into Samoa. The va tapuia accommodates all things living and dead, and the mobile phone slots into this criteria. I further posit the questionable use of the mobile phone by youth has led to the aitu rhetoric being circulated by locals as a means to restore the social order of village life and a reminder of the ancient ways of fa’asamoa endorsed by the va tapuia.

The writings of early missionaries give an account of a time in which deities and spirits ruled Samoa although they are not scholarly articles and the motivations for their writings are not clear, they provide an account of the relationships that early Samoans had with the ancestral aitu. Tagaloa existed before there was sky or earth, and used his environment to create the universe and the earth, including the sea, sky, people, and other gods. Despite Samoa being a Christian nation founded on God its relationship with the va existed before missionaries arrived in Samoa. Although Christianity spread rapidly throughout Samoa, it is believed that the goddess Nafanua prophesied that the arrival of a new godhead for Malietoa would come from heaven, preparing Samoa for this new god and for it to take its reign in Samoa. According to Samoan mythology; the concept of va existed before Samoans were ‘created.’ These fundamental beliefs continue to shape Samoa’s social, cultural, and political landscape despite the
strong influence of Christianity and Westernisation. The *va tapuia* existed before Samoa existed. It has been through the transition the nation has taken from a polytheist nation to monotheist one; from colonisation to becoming the independent nation it is today, and persevered through the technological advancement and modernisation of Samoa. The legacy of the ancestral *aitu* remains relevant in fast-changing times. Academic literature on technology and the spirit realm globally indicates widespread interest in the subject and has resulted in the production of television programmes and movies that feed the desire to know, be entertained, or understand the spirit world. Why is it, despite advancements in technology and knowledge, do people still ascribe “mystical powers to ultimately very material technologies?” (Sconce, 2000, p.6.) Is this fascination with fantasy science fiction, occult and the unexplained the reason why urban legends (and other unexplained mysteries) exist despite 150 years of electronic communication? For Samoa, the *aitu* rhetoric, although intriguing, is not just ‘fascination’ but part of their cultural heritage and legacy. The *aitu* dialogue always gives credit to the ancestral heritage of Samoans and, whether it is believed or not, it is accepted and as part of Samoa’s cultural history. The vignettes in this chapter not only illustrate this but highlight the societal anxieties around change and how the mobile phone is changing the way Samoan’s are communicating. Access to youth once policed by adult supervision is now surpassed by the individual addressability of the mobile phone and the consequences (stated in chapter 4) have caused moral panic. The regurgitation of the *aitu* rhetoric in these vignettes enforces the *aitu* as a guide to being ‘good’ Samoan citizens. The next section explores the influence the *aitu* had on the everyday activities and how this influence carries over in modern day Samoa.

Samoans once worshipped a diversity of gods, such as gods of the rainbow, boatbuilding, fishing, and war. This pantheistic outlook helps us to understand why some Samoans think that the *aitu* has powers over mobile phones. Perhaps they believe that if there were gods of boat building in ancient Samoa, why should there not be a god of mobile phones who has the power to send text messages from the after-world? The *aitu* are also perceived to be able to use their ‘powers’ to transcend the after-world and manipulate whatever they want. The mobile phone has
therefore been adopted into Samoan folklore and urban legends, including the ‘text message from the grave’ case I discussed earlier. The spirit guide knows what is best. The power relationship the aitu had with early Samoa was embedded in fear, and Samoans would appease the gods with gifts.

The stories of the aitu texting and taking up residence in billboards are warnings as to how people should behave. In the former, the young boy was admonished for being awake through the hours of the night, indicating the aitu’s dislike of youth occupying the hours that the aitu operates. There was speculation that the aitu on the billboard was unhappy with the proposed changes to village protocols that were part of its heritage. The aitu’s power to live in the ‘mirror world’ and punish anyone, including high-ranking chiefs, gave the aitu influence over how their Samoan followers behaved. Even today, although for some the tales of the aitu are no longer ‘gospel’ but urban legends, they nevertheless influence behaviour. In the same way that Nafanua directed and guided her followers to victory in battle, the aitu is seen as a ‘guide’ and represents a standard that followers should live by. It is this association with the aitu as a guide that leads me to hypothesize the circulation of urban legends involving aitu and technology as a means to guide youth and remind adults of the Samoan way of life. In my interviews with participants from Island Breeze, I asked them whether they believe the aitu still exists today, and I received mixed responses. Some stated that only early Samoans believed in the aitu, but now they believe in the God of the bible. Others professed the Christian faith, but still believed the aitu power was real. The majority felt that the urban legends were ‘made up’ to ‘scare’ the youth into behaving correctly further supporting my hypothesis. Some thought this practice could help them to address the issues families were facing due to of the questionable activities of youth on mobile phones. The story of the aitu texting the young man was well-known among those of the Catholic faith, and was vaguely recognized by those of other denominations. The majority of my participants did not buy into the fact that the aitu had texted the young man; only a few were unsure if it were true. My participants also stated that they had heard of this story through the coconut wireless, which is one component of the Island Breeze communicative ecology. Other news of the encounter was obtained through the radio or the
newspaper, as was the case with the ‘aitu in the billboard.’ However, as mentioned earlier, my participant’s accounts of the same story became more exaggerated than the original story in the newspaper. Their varied versions had the aitu manifesting and scaring people away. One participant’s version said the aitu murdered a person for being drunk and disorderly around the billboard. When I asked for details of the incident they were not able to corroborate because they heard it through the coconut wireless, from a relative who had visited from another village. Irrespective of what side of the argument they chose, my participants all felt that people who ‘misbehave’ around aitu territory are testing the spirits, and which is not a good thing. Again, the theme of respecting the aitu and abiding by the rules for fear of punishment is continuing.

The articles from the United Kingdom concerning cell phones and ghosts provided scientific evidence to rationalise their claim, and this makes it very different to the aitu encounters in the texting and billboard stories. The positioning of the Samoan newspaper story as headline news on the front page shows the value the newspaper places on the subject. In comparison, the UK article on cell phones scaring away British ghosts appeared on page four of the newspaper and was a small piece of just 200 words. Other differentiations between the two reports is that article from the UK provided a scientific explanation from an expert regarding the appearances of ghosts that was logically linked to the cell phone, while those interviewed for the Samoan Observer had varying explanations for the story, ranging from revenge of a disgruntled editor to the manufacturer’s error and, of course, that it truly was the work of the aitu. It was only through the reporting of the incident in the Savali that the manufacturer’s view was made known. The newspaper reporting also put on record the viewpoint of a local business man in signage who explained that there are smartphones that have a ghost effect application that superimposes blurry images onto photographs. The Samoa Observer did not interview the manufacturer, nor discuss any mobile applications that are designed to create ghost effect images.

To add to this, the village Mayor’s claim that the editor’s “writings” were the cause of it all provided more speculation about the authenticity of this claim (Tavita, 2013). It would appear this legacy is being used to sell
papers and possibly to act as a smokescreen to plot revenge on a village that banished an allegedly disgruntled editor. These claims signify the pervasiveness of the aitu legacy in Samoan society today. Despite contention around whether the aitu exists or not, such stories continue to affect people’s behaviour, at least insofar as they communicate moral warnings. Anyone who does not abiding by the aitu’s rules—whether enforced by the aitu or by society—will be punished.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the urban legend I named “text messages from the grave” to understand why the mobile phone found its way into Samoan mythology and how its inclusion in folklore influences the va tapuia or sacred space. My research leads me to conclude that the va tapuia is not changed in anyway by the inclusion of the mobile phone in its rhetoric, rather, the moral panics and anxieties around mobile phone usage has increased the circulation of this rhetoric as a means to remind Samoans’ of the Samoan way of life (fa’asamoan) and return to the social order of fa’amatai.

The va tapuia has transcended the many transitions that Samoa has undertaken—from polytheism to Christianity, colonisation to independence— and still its sacred relationship with Samoa remains. In ancient Samoa, the ancestral aitu had a major influence on Samoa’s social, cultural, and political life, and their advice was often sought out. In this modern age of technology, we find the va tapuia accommodating the mobile phone as a means to advise the youth to not be up all night on their mobiles because the night time belongs to the aitu. This rhetoric is consistent with the ways ancestral aitu would give warnings in ancient Samoa with the Samoan belief that the aitu lives in the ‘mirror world’ and transcends the after world and that of the living. Although not presently worshipped per se, the aitu still holds value for the Samoan people and according to my findings is revered and used in the form of storytelling or urban legends to influence behaviour that aligns with fa’asamoan and the social order of fa’amatai.
6.0 Mobile Phones in the Va: Fa’amobile

6.01 Introduction

The preceding chapters have presented evidence from my fieldwork of how the va is lived out in Samoan society, mainly in a rural village context. I have shown how the mobile phone influences the space in-between the hierarchy and fa’amatai system, its use and non-use in the village communicative ecologies, its place in Samoan mythology, and its role in secret liaisons facilitated by the va fa’apouliuli. This chapter aims to demonstrate the extent to which mobile phone practices influence or changes the va by revisiting the va model that I presented earlier, in which I positioned the va in an academic framework, illustrating its boundaries and tangible and intangible qualities. I will also discuss the third principle of va, whose purpose is to nurture the space in-between (teu le va) and demonstrates the cyclic nature of va. I argue that, despite the influence that mobile phones have on the feagaiga and va fealoaloai’i, the reconciliatory properties of teu le va are the main reason why the va remains essentially unchanged.

Having discussed the varied stories from my fieldwork of va and mobile phones, I re-introduce the model as the ‘mobile va model’ in two contextual frameworks, one of a Samoan rural village and another incorporating some scenarios from interviews with participants living in urban Samoa. The purpose of these two models is to show the contrast of the rules regarding mobile phone usage in rural Samoa and the reality of mobile practises in this context. The first version of the mobile va model reflects where the mobile phone sits according to the village rules, and will illustrate social restrictions on mobile usage. The second version represents the influence of co-presence on the va in Island Breeze, illustrating the conflict between the reality of mobile usage versus the expectations imposed by fa’amatai. This chapter will illustrate the mobile phone’s ‘place’ in the va and discuss the reality of fa’amobile and other mobile-related influences in this context.
‘Fa’amobile’ is a phrase I created to represent changes in social structure and agency. It asks, if change is a “social process enabled by collective culture” (Wagoner et al 2012, pg5), what intersections or culture clashes can be anticipated? In other words, is the mobile phone being used to substitute communication normally used in a fa’asamo context? Fa’asamo translates to “the Samoan way of life” (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1996, pg). It is a set of principals or code of conduct that is steeped in tradition and enacted in ceremonial rituals and every day practises and which strengths unity and played a historical role in resisting the colonial mandate (Davidson 1967, Meleisea 1987). The causative prefix "fa'a" means “in the manner of” (Pawley 1966), “Mobile” means to move around freely, but in this context it describes the mobile technology that gives one the freedom to communicate without being confined to one place. Like other technologies imagined and used in the interest of “development,” the mobile phone has evolved into a “central and cultural technology” with the ‘power’ to reconstruct identities, set trends, and micro-organise lives (Goggin 2006 pg 2-3, Lipset 2013).

6.1 The Va Model

Throughout this thesis the va has been described as the essence of fa’asamo (Anae, 2010, Lui, 2003) and shapes how Samoans interpret situations and information and how they express themselves. Albert Refiti (2013) recognises that the va resides in different spaces and states that it is “at the centre of the “circle of fa’amatai” chiefs’ council, in the middle of the malae village meeting ground, on the faces of the gathered people, and inscribed on the plan of the faletele ancestor meeting house” (Refiti, 2013, pg 5).

To focus on the va means to analyse the behavioural change of Samoans in each space. This model aims to describe what the different spaces the va encompass. In the model I use the colour red to indicate the essence of fa’asamo. Whether it is a formal discussion, meeting, or informal daily activity, the va is present. The spaces are interchangeable and at times overlapping. Through my observations and data collection, this model (in conjunction with other Pacific academic va models) has enabled me to analyse what motivates a Samoan man or woman in village Samoa to use their mobile phones differently in different spaces. For example, why might they freely use
their mobile phone in Sphere 3, sparingly in Sphere 2, and not at all in Sphere 1? This model has also aided my further analysis of how, why, and where mobile phones are used in each sphere.

The evidence from my observations and data collection, suggest that the essence of fa’asamoa has a major influence on how one behaves in each sphere. This essence is the feagaiga, best described as an agreement, contract, or covenant. Samoans regard the va and feagaiga in the same light, so throughout all interactions each Samoan is aware of this covenant. The socialisation process of respect in the aiga is premised on the feagaiga between a brother and his sister. It has been described by scholars (Davidson, 1967, Stewart-Withers 2011, Meleisea 1987, Gershon 2012) as the balance of the relationship between a brother and a sister. Samoans also refer to this as the va pa’ia (blessed kinship), in other words, in the mind/belief of the brother, his sister’s life is sacred and sacrosanct. This belief provides a”metaphorical foundation for the ideological structure by which order is maintained in Samoan Society” and is a microcosm of the macrocosm of Samoan society (Schoeffel 1995 p 98 as cited by Stewart-Wither’s 2011, pg 174, Gershon 2012).

I identify this microcosm as three spheres in which ‘Samoanness’ is expressed to varying degrees. When fa’asamoa is most central or prominent, such as during a kava ceremony, the mobile phone and other technologies are prohibited. In the outer layers, the mobile phone is used on a daily basis, except when there is a ritual or ceremony being performed (such as devotions or a meeting of matais).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sphere 1</th>
<th>Sphere 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A set of principals or code of conduct steeped in tradition and enacted in ceremonial rituals</strong></td>
<td><strong>Everyday practises</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- A space, event or conversation where cultural protocols are observed. ICTs are not permitted.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Of Village Samoa (rural) where there are fewer, but some, limitations on ICT use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sphere 3</th>
<th>Everyday practises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Urban Samoa where there is the strongest Western influence and village hierarchy is not emphasised as strongly as it is in rural Samoa. ICTs are used with very little or no restrictions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An illustration of activity in Sphere 1 is the following account of the visit of Rt Hon John Key, New Zealand’s Prime Minister, to Island Breeze in June 2014. On the morning of the visit, the village matais gathered in the fale tele, the big Samoan meeting house. In this *fale* the men sat according to their rank, from the highest ranked *matai* to the unranked young men of the village. Each wore traditional Samoan clothes to indicate their role in the *Ava* or *Kava* ceremony, a ritual that precedes all important cultural meetings. Teraangi Hiroa, an anthropologist, politician, and medical doctor, gives an apt description of the ceremony:
Nothing of any importance can be commenced in Samoa without a preliminary bowl of kava. Visitors of any note must be welcomed not only with a bowl of kava but also with some pieces of the dried root. Thus when visitors enter a village, they are allowed a little time in which to rest and compose themselves after their journey. The local chiefs usually gather in a nearby house until they see that the visitors are ready. Each chief of any standing brings with him some dried kava, generally a tungase, or failing that, an ordinary piece without stem (fasi 'ava). Apart from the presentation aspect of the question, he owes it to his own social position to bring something. Otherwise he does not exist in the fa'alupega (chiefly list of the village).

By the time they enter the guest house, the visitors have assumed their correct positions besides the wall posts that mark their rank. The local chiefs may shake hands as they enter. They may drop their pieces of kava root in front of the visiting talking chief. There is no doubt as to who or where he is. He is sitting by the middle wall post of the front side of the middle section of the house. On the other hand they may take their kava root with them and pass directly to their own positions in the house.

(Revised 2016)

Like most Samoan fale, the fale tele has a circular-shaped base. Within this oval perimeter where the ceremony proceedings were unfolding, all mobiles (and other forms of technology) were banned. Out of respect for the culture, guests were asked to switch their phones off and keep them in their bags or pockets. Within the oval perimeter it was understood that it was disrespectful to have their mobile phones switched on and used; however, on the outside of this perimeter there were no restrictions.
Picture 1: Ranking chiefs and the unranked men prepare the kava ceremony by Marion Muliaumaseali’I 2014.

Picture 2: Distinguished guests prepare to receive the kava by Marion Muliaumaseali’I 2014.
The New Zealand Prime Minister’s high profile meant that media and journalists from the Pacific, New Zealand and Australia were following this tour. The sacredness of the ceremony within the perimeter was juxtaposed by the media ‘frenzy’ occurring on the outside of the fale. TV and radio Reporters, camera men and women surrounded the fale for a better angle. Journalists and sound technicians moved in slow motion so as not to disturb the proceedings.

Camera sounds and iPad clicks filled the air as the talking chief signified that Kava should be distributed to distinguished guests. For those accustomed to the Kava ceremony, the media ‘noise’ was a huge contrast to what is usually a serene atmosphere that signifies dignity and respect. It was a unique occasion. In order for the media to be present and be allowed to capture this moment through broadcast and still pictures, the high chief had to raise the pending event at the village council to ensure that all matai were briefed and preparations for the ceremony were allocated to the men’s and women’s groups in the village.
This scenario assisted in creating the va model that best explains the concepts of fa’asamoā and how (and why) the mobile phone is used (or not used) in traditional and contemporary spaces. The va model focused on the types of communication that occurred in each sphere and the invisible boundary that surrounded the fale tele during the kava ceremony. What is it that ensured that everyone within the fale tele kept their phones out of sight and switched off? What prohibited those on the perimeter from entering the meeting house? For the foreign guests it was respect and advice from their cultural advisor. For a Samoan it is the assumption that all Samoans ‘know’ (Suaalii-Sauni, 2010) this code. At a deeper level, this ‘invisible boundary’ or code of conduct is how Samoans behave when they are showing respect for the va or the space in-between.

6.1.1 Sphere 1: No Technology Zone

I have identified Sphere 1 as a ‘no technology zone,’ (figure 5) using the colour red to signify that everything that occurs in this space is the heart, the nucleus, or the essence of fa’asamoā. To bring context to this zone, I quote Refiti (2013) , who describes what this sanctum means in a Samoan context:

> Inside is the dangerous play of forces: pa’ia or divine power consecrated in the ali’i paramount chief and mamalu the will and influence prescribed to the tulafale or instrument of power through the mode of oration. Within the sanctum is the power of ancestral belonging (divine) moulded by demiurges (matai) via oratory (craft) and made productive by laws and rules (pule). When you take a place in the ring that forms the circle of fa’amatai you are opened up to encompass the time and space of the ancestors, you belong to the time of others. The time of the world ceases to be in the ring.

(Refiti, 2013. pg 5)

This space depicts the ceremonies where protocols are observed and the esteemed hierarchical language of matai and rituals such as the kava ceremony are held. It is here that “the time of the world ceases;”(Refiti 2013, pg 5) in other words, mobile phones and ICTs are banned. Much like the scenario with the New Zealand Prime Minister and
the village kava ceremony, the space within the *fale tele* became Sphere 1. This is the only sphere in which I did not witness any mobile phone usage throughout my research.

![Figure 5 Sphere 1](image)

**6.1.2 Sphere 2: People and Technology Collide**

The village space is located in Sphere 2 (refer to figure 6). It overlaps Sphere 1 and Sphere 3, urban Samoa, to illustrate the spaces where *faʻasamoa* is still observed, but not as strictly as in Sphere 1. This is where daily village life occurs, where the indigenous communication is central but is used alongside a smattering of technology, televisions, radios and mobile technology. The overlap between Spheres 2 and 3 also represents the continuities and discontinuities of cultural practises and changes to *faʻasamoa* and the adaptation of Western culture within Samoan society. How do these converge with the mobile phone to affect the *va‘o*? The media whirl outside the *fale tele* during the *Kava* ceremony could be placed in Sphere 2 (or 3). It was within the confines of the village, and there was understanding as to why the technology was permitted.
Here is where I observed how Samoans lived out their daily routines, which include the protocols and rituals of *fa’asamoa* mixed in with modern-day influences. In this zone, villagers transition in and out of Sphere 1 and 2 more frequently. An example is the village curfew in which prayer is observed. All technology is switched off and family prayer and meetings are held. This is when the family enter into sphere one. Usually, after the meeting is family time in which a meal is served. Technology is not to be used until chores are done. Then, the family watch television or have ‘free’ time, which is another example of when they transition out of the red zone and back to where Spheres 2 and 3 intercept with mobile phone and other technologies. The transitioning out of each sphere creates tension for some of the locals. One interviewee, who I will call Sila, shares her thoughts about how respecting the *va* between her and her father, and his rules around the mobile phone, caused her embarrassment and resentment towards *fa’asamoa* and its rules.

Sila is twenty-seven years of age and lives in the village with eleven family members. She has had two years of higher education but, due to financial difficulty, could not complete her bachelor’s degree. Her first year completing an Early Childhood Centre Diploma required her to move to town to be closer to school. This also meant she was now allowed to own a mobile phone. Her father believes that a phone is a big responsibility and is a
reward for those who do well in education or by gaining employment. So at the age of 23 she was finally allowed a mobile phone, but it made her self-conscious:

*I would sit in class in Apia and I was surrounded by these ‘town kids’ who were using their phones so easily, but I was embarrassed because I didn’t know how to use mine. When it rang I would hide it in my bag and I was too scared to answer it in front of the ‘town kids’ in case I wasn’t using it correctly. I began to resent my dad and his rules because I felt so old and so behind in not knowing how to use this phone. But now I am older and I see his wisdom. It wasn’t long before I made friends in school and they showed me how to use the phone. It wasn’t long before I wished someone would call me or text me so I could show how confident I had become with my phone. My father’s rules didn’t stop there because when I went home for the weekends I had to put my phone away at certain times. Every night at 6pm we had prayers and family meeting. I had to switch my phone off during this meeting but because our family meal was directly after I was not able to turn my phone on until hours later. We are not allowed to have our phone with us during dinner time. At first I found it very hard and more resentment built up towards my father because I was missing out on all the messages from my friends and I didn’t like the rules; but now I see his wisdom and I carefully watch over my younger sibling.*

The mobile phone created tension in the va between Sila and her father. The pull of wanting to be connected with friends on her mobile encroached upon nurturing the va between her and her father. Although she now says she can see the wisdom in his rules, the tension caused her to hold resentment towards him. She explained that it almost made her violate the va and disobey her father. For this young woman, the mobile phone gave her more independence and a new confidence. This was also nurtured by living in urban Samoa, where the locals are not as rigid with rules regarding mobile phone use as they are in the village. Her return to the village on the weekends placed her under the rules of her father, but having the mobile phone allowed her to keep connected to her ‘new’
life and friends in Apia. Tensions arose when Sila could not be as free as she was in Apia to use her phone and keep
in contact with her friends. Sila admits that it was frustrating, but would explain that ‘this is fa’asamoa and you
obey your family.’ The va fealoaloa’i between Sila and her parents was more important than her need to use her
mobile phone. Although it was hard for her at the time, she now is able to guide her younger siblings in using their
phones responsibly.

Although Sila states she did not disobey her father, she did acknowledge an unmistakable tension between them.
The predictable village life with its rules and curfews became a hindrance to Sila’s new social circle that was
nurtured through co-presence. The ease and flow of this mediated sociality that Sila participated in freely and
without restriction was now limited by the village curfews and her duty to respect the va. The contrast of urban
Samoa to rural Samoa, and more specifically Island Breeze, is demonstrated through Sila’s story. To further explore
the dichotomy between these spheres, the next section looks at my participants’ accounts of their experiences
with mobile phones in the nation’s capital, which is located in Sphere 3 of the va model.

6.2 Transitions of Change

Before analysing Sphere 3, it is important to briefly visit the transitions that Samoa has made from a colonised
nation to an independent nation. This will bring context to the nuanced tensions within the different spheres,
especially with respect to freedom of mobile phone usage. Academic literature indicates that the mobile phone has
changed the ways the world communicates, and this thesis specifically asks how it is changing the va. Here I
examine why, and in what circumstances, Samoans have embraced mobile technology. I explore how it is possible
that the Samoan concept of va remains at the heart of fa’amatai in this modern age.

Despite her start as a colonised nation, Samoa has made significant progress from being colonised under Germany
from 1899-1914 to becoming an independent nation in 1962. Her adopted parliamentary democracy is a variation
of the Westminster system (Davidson, 1967, Iati, 2013), and the Samoan fa’amatai socio-political system that exists alongside it is a picture of Western and Samoan ideals working side-by-side. Samoa’s transition to modernisation has seen the nation try to maintain its culture while adapting to the Western or global economy. This has caused cultural clashes between fa’asamo beliefs, especially the idea that cultural lands are at the heart of fa’asamoa, and neo-liberal economic policies advocating economic advancement through the sale of state-owned and cultural lands. Differing opinions on economic and cultural sustainability have caused tension between the indigenous and introduced political systems, with many many fearing a loss of cultural identity:

The Samoan capacity to be active agents in transforming their society has weakened due to the complex range of globalizing forces (the parallel processes of diversification of the economy and integration into the global political economy are significant here) and, because an increasingly plural Samoan society is less able (or willing?) to agree on how to manage these forces. As a result, those elements of Samoan social organization which enabled it to manage external influences in the past are losing their resiliency. (pg125)

(Fairbairn-Dunlop and Macpherson, 2010)

The dichotomy of loyalty to tradition versus modernisation is reflected in the different ways that each village in Samoa is governed and their occasional conflicts with the Government (Iati, 2013). There are villages in Samoa that have chosen to move away from the fa’amatai system and are instead governed by local law enforcement, as in most Western societies. Generally, rural villages (Spheres 1-2) are more restrictive of mobile phone use (and technology), but in Sphere 3 (urban Samoa), the potential for transition of change to occur through the mobile phone (such as fa’amobile) is higher because the township (Apia) has been the most Westernised part of Samoa since colonisation (Davidson, 1967). In the following section I describe Sphere 3 before discussing the position of the mobile phone in the va model.
6.2.1 Sphere 3: Strong Western Influence

The third layer represents (figure 7) the town area where there is the strongest Western influence. The mobile phone is used relatively freely in comparison to Spheres 1 and 2. Due to my extended time in village Samoa, my research does not delve into this area as deeply as in Sphere 1 and 2, but I make a few comparisons based on the interviews I held and my observations during the last few weeks of my fieldwork in Samoa’s capital, Apia.

Figure 7 Sphere 3

In Apia, the majority of my interviewees were given a mobile phone before they turned thirteen years of age because of after school activities and the need for the parents to coordinate pick-up times or communicate any unexpected changes throughout the day. This is a contrast to Sila’s story, in which she did not receive a phone until she had ‘earned’ the right to own one by reaching university or being gainfully employed. In urban Samoa the non-compulsory attachment to the fa’amatai system of village Samoa means a more independent existence. The mobile phone becomes central to communication for urban families, which contrasts with the communicative
ecologies of Island Breeze, in which indigenous communication is central. The next scenario illustrates the influence of the mobile phone in Sphere 3 and the potential of fa’amobile to occur there.

Sala is 18 years of age. She attends the National University of Samoa (NUS) and has lived in urban Samoa all her life. She says that her family are not heavily into the fa’asamoa, but when they visit relatives who live in the rural areas she is expected to know what to do. There are very few restrictions on the use of mobile phones in her home, and Sala has even introduced WhatsApp, the mobile messenger application, to her parents. They find more convenient than texting because they can have group ‘conversations’ with her sisters overseas. Here we see Matsuda’s (2005) notion of ‘full-time intimate community’ in practise. Matsuda’s research discusses how Japanese mobile users have a select group of people (often family or close friends) that they are in constant contact with, creating a full-time intimate community. Matsuda states that it is not so much the content that matters; rather, the members of this ‘full-time intimate community’ are aware of each other’s state of being (happy, sad, walking, eating, travelling, etc.), illustrating that intimacy is being communicated.

Sala’s main concern is that although WhatsApp is great for coordinating the family outside of the home, she finds that her family message one another even though they may be in the next room:

*My father is an engineer and my mother is a medical officer. I am the third of four sisters, two of whom are in New Zealand at university. My younger sister is at high school. My family use WhatsApp to communicate to each other. Nobody I know uses text messaging in my circle of friends, it is so ancient. My sister and I introduced WhatsApp to my mum and dad because it doesn’t cost as much. I only spend $10 SAT per month on data because we have WiFi at home. I receive an allowance of $120.00 SAT per week but that’s mostly because I own a car. We don’t have any rules in our home in relation to using the mobile phone, well we used to not be allowed to have it when we went to bed but my parents gave up because we would keep...*
using it late at night. I think the phones have changed how my family relate to one another because we even
WhatsApp each other even though we’re in the same house or in the next room. I am concerned for my little
sister because she is always on the phone and when we always argue over it when I mention it. I do talk to
my mum about things but when things get out of hand dad gets involved and that’s when we listen. We
don’t have fa’asamoa at home, only when we go to my dad’s family. We have to do the feaus (chores) wear
an ie lava lava (sarong) and we are not allowed to be on our phones all the time. I usually check it when
nobody is looking but we can’t be on our phones when the family are together because we will get told off. It
is considered rude and antisocial. The only negative thing with mobile phones is that my family don’t
communicate as much face-to-face.

Looking at Sala’s family through the lens of va, I immediately see there are violations to the va fealoaloa’i between
Sala and her parents, where Sala and her sister were not allowed to have their phones when they went to bed but
their parents gave up when this rule was being disobeyed. The other violation is the va fealoaloa’i between Sala
and her younger sister:

*My younger sister sometimes sends angry messages to me when we’re fighting at home and then she blocks
me on WhatsApp and she blocks me in person like not talking to me.*

This *va* has been violated because Sala is the elder sister, and in *fa’asamoa* the eldest must be respected. When
there are disputes between siblings, then both parties are required to *teu le va* (Nurture the space in-between).
Sala alludes to this when she mentions that she spoke to her mother about an issue, and her mother then took the
issue to the authority figure in the house: “but when things get out of hand dad gets involved and that’s when we
listen.” Here the *va* was restored through their father, but the interesting thing is how these arguments and
conversations occur within a family under one roof in their own silos.
This is very un-Samoan, and Sala’s concern that her family use WhatsApp to communicate more than speaking face-to-face is an example of how the mobile phone has impacted the va fealoaloa’i within this family. These scenarios depict the contrast between Spheres 2 and 3, as reflected in the va model. The lighter shade of red indicates a more Western-centric environment, with less emphasis on fa’amatai and indigenous rule.

6.3 Fa‘asamo and Fa‘amobile

The scenarios presented in the third sphere indicate a clash in cultural values and are attributed to a combination of the history of urban Samoa and the individualistic tendencies of mobile phone usage. This has often been referred to throughout the thesis as the individual addressability (Ling and Campbell, 2011) of the mobile phone. I discuss it here in relation to the concept of fa‘amobile, in which there is a transition of change related to the mobile phone through the components of social structure and agency in a collective culture. The individual addressability of the mobile phone creates silos, as illustrated in Sala’s family’s use of WhatsApp to communicate from separate rooms of the house. This runs counter to fa‘asamo. Traditionally, Samoans are communal and thrive in collective context (Amosa, 2010, Meleisea, 1987): to be outside of this collective is to be outside of the relational space. Health practitioners and psychologists describe the Samoan self and their relation to this space in a paper advocating appropriate Pacific methodologies in the health sector:

The Samoan self was described as having meaning only in relationship with other people, not as an individual. This self could not be separated from the ‘va’ or relational space that occurs between an individual and parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and other extended family and community members. I cannot say that I am a person, just me; (because) then I will be nothing without my other connections . . . The idea that a person can be an individual unto him/herself is a new concept which was introduced with Christianity. Christianity introduced the notion that one looked to oneself first.

(Tamasese et al. 2005 pg 3)
Sala’s household is in Sphere 3, where technology and mobile phones are widely used, and Wi-Fi for the household is standard for middle to upper-class households. There are pockets of Sphere 1 (or the red zone) in urban Samoa, but this is mainly for cultural protocols where fa’asamoa is prominent for the length of an event or gathering, such as a church service, a funeral, wedding, or for government meetings where the kava ceremony is held. Apia is the hub of business, tourism, and government administration. Thanks to a booming tourism industry, its café culture is developing and tourists can stay connected at internet café’s or via the Wi-Fi in their hotel. Samoa is recognised as a developing country, and Western influence is strongest in urban Samoa. This is one reason why Samoans who live in urban Samoa are not so bound by the rules found in village Samoa. They have more ‘freedom’ because they are not under strict village rules or protocols, such as those of Sala’s family. I did not interview Sala’s parents to discuss their views of mobile phones in the va, but given that urban Samoa is a developing society with the freedom of technology use and Wi-Fi, perhaps these WhatsApp conversations (and any other mediated conversations) within the aiga represent an emerging space for fa’amobile. Is the convenience of communicating via co-presence replacing traditional family meetings?

The arguments between Sala and her younger sibling occurred on WhatsApp, but were dealt with in the va. When the argument manifested verbally, their father got involved, causing the siblings to teu le va. The sibling rivalry occurring on WhatsApp eventually spilled out into ‘real’ life, disrupting harmony in the family. When mobile messaging or WhatsApp conversations are unmonitored and decisions regarding mobile use do not reflect the values of va, then social problems surface. These can include broadly contentious topics, such as over “free nights” and the va fa’apouliuli (hidden space), or they can be as ‘minor’ as a sibling dispute. What if the parents are involved in these conversations and micro-coordinating is occurring on the mobile within the house? Is fa’amobile being practised here, where the mobile phone is taking over family meetings in which the usual face-to-face connection and checking-in on each other occurs?
Since my research focuses on rural Samoa, I was not able to conduct comprehensive research on this topic, but given the characteristics of urban Samoa and the infrastructure that allows online communication to be available via Wi-Fi, this could be an emerging trend. The possibility of these emerging trends indicates how the absence of *fa’amatai* (indigenous rule) in Sphere 3 influences local uses of the mobile phone. These uses reflect the local (and historic) understanding that the Apia is the modern part of Samoa and houses the potential to change ideas central to *fa’ásamoa*.

6.4 The *Va* Model

Having analysed the nuanced ways in which the mobile phone is used in the three spheres, I illustrate its place in the *va*. The mobile phone’s greatest potential for influence lies in Sphere 3 where people have the freedom to use the device without restrictions. In Sphere 2 there are limitations on where and when the phone is used, and the phone is not present at all in Sphere 1, since it is banned in this zone. I decided that the best way to present these limitations throughout the *va* model was to superimpose the mobile phone (presented as a triangle) upon the three spheres.

![Figure 8 Mobile Va Model](image-url)
The triangular shape displays the gradual reduction of mobile phone’s presence from Sphere 3 to Sphere 2 and, most importantly, the noticeable point at which the apex stops. Its resting spot before the un-perforated circumference of Sphere 1 demonstrates the banning of the mobile phone (and other ICTs) because of the strength of fa’asamo’a in this va, also illustrated through the deeper shade of red. The perforations on the circumferences represent the level of freedom that mobile phone usage is permitted in each sphere. As freedom increases, the red shade grows lighter.

The addition of the mobile phone (triangle) to the va model conceptually models the mobile phone’s influence on the va. This illustration is consistent with what the villagers say about their mobile phone usage within the village rules. However, upon closer observation and candid discussion about their mobile phone practises, I concluded that the model should reflect the changing practices that my research discovered. The vignettes presented in this thesis clearly indicate the tension between mobile phone usage and respecting the principles of va. The next section will illustrate this by revisiting the concept of the hidden space, va fa’apouliuli, to demonstrate the effects of co-presence on the va.

6.4.1 Co-presence as a Hidden Space

The intangible aspect of the mobile phone I wish to illustrate is the va fa’apouliuli, the hidden space. As discussed in Chapter 4, the hidden space is essentially co-presence. I have labelled it va fa’apouliuli to place co-presence in a context that my participants identify with. It represents the acceleration of the mediation of ‘immoral’ coordination through the mobile phone. Locals’ awareness of the intangible properties of the mobile phone is highlighted when people discuss the moral panics caused by stories circulating of the mobile phone as a conduit for inappropriate and secret relationships. In chapter four, my discussion regarding va fa’apouliuli analysed its influence on the va fealoalo’a’i (relational space) and feagaiga (covenant) between Samoan male and female relations. I explored the tensions that va fa’apouliuli caused, and the breach it created in the sacred covenant. In this chapter I revisit some
of the vignettes from Chapter 4 to explore what the nature of this tension looks like, and to discuss the contrasts between the Samoan concept of va and its impact on mobile phone practises.

6.5. Mobile Va Model

Figure 9 Effect of Mediated Spaces on the Va

The mobile va model illustrated above shows an obvious disruption in the conceptual boundaries between Spheres 2 and 3. This disruption could be described as a blurring of the space in-between family, parents, siblings, and males and females. The mobile va model illustrates the vignettes of the activity in the hidden space (va fa’apouliuli) described in Chapter 4. The fragmented curves of the conceptual boundary between Sphere 2 and 3 demonstrate the influence of co-presence in facilitating a breach in the va. If we apply Tjora’s (2011) study of communicative transparency layers, which showed youth often using the communicative transparency layers to mask something, we understand from this how co-presence can facilitate unmonitored activity that potentially caused a breach in the va. An example is Tjora’s participants who hid their relationship from friends using Short-messaging Service (SMS) to communicate when they were in groups. This thesis has touched on the intangible properties of the
mobile phone as presence or co-presence because they parallel the intangible properties of va and provide the strongest influence on the space in-between.

6.6. The Va Fa’apouliuli and Reconciliation

Conceptual Mobile Va Model 10.a

Contextual Mobile Va Model 10.b

Placing the conceptual and contextual models of va next to each other visually demonstrates how the mobile phone influences the va. The very first vignette I presented in Chapter 4 illustrates this further. In that vignette, Lina told a story about how her daughter hid a relationship with a boy in Apia that developed without her knowledge via the mobile phone. Lina only found out about this relationship when her daughter revealed that she was pregnant. If we apply both models to this scenario, we can take the va model (10a) as Lina’s perception of her daughter’s behaviour. For Lina and many of my participants, village life entails duty and service. The village’s rules protect its members and ensure that roles are fulfilled. The va model (figure.1) depicts the boundaries and the moderate allowances of ICTs such as having the radio or television on outside of curfews. As a devout religious woman, Lina assumed that her daughter, who was raised in the church, would honour the rules about owning a mobile phone. She was given the phone as a reward for getting into a good high school, and enable communication with her while she was away. For Lina, ‘rules’ or the boundaries regarding mobile phone ownership and use keeps agreements tidy and clear, so that (theoretically) no discrepancies occur. If we apply the mobile va model (10b) to
the daughter’s experience, we can see how the va fa’apouliuli interfered with the respect for the va practiced between mother, daughter and community. I depict the contextual boundary lines as disproportionate to reflect the extent to which the va was violated through the practice of mobile co-presence. Using the two models together clearly shows how co-presence has the strongest influence on the space in-between. This answers the main research question, but it is still not clear whether this influence changes the va. If the va between Lina and her daughter remains in breach, does this mean they will never have a trusting mother daughter relationship? To answer this question, the third principle of va is analysed along with vignettes to emphasize how the va is not changed despite the influence of co-presence. This is because the va is cyclic in nature.

6.6.1 The Cyclic Nature of Va

The va fa’a-pouliuli created by the mobile phone provides the potential for the va to be violated, but it does not ‘change’ the va. Instead, the consequences of rebellious behaviour, although hidden, eventually become transparent (pregnancy, running away with a boyfriend). Following this there is an opportunity for the offending parties to teu le va (nurture the space in-between). This opportunity is the beginning of what I call the cyclic nature of va. The case in Chapter 4, in which Loni chose not to accept the fine and instead leave the Komiti, was resolved a few weeks later when she approached the Komiti to restore the va. She was called to a meeting by the President, who wanted to check on her and her family’s wellbeing. Through this dialogue, Loni was able to make restitution and be accepted back into the Komiti. This is one example of the va’s cyclic nature. It illustrates how the va is encompassed by the cyclic nature of the fa’amatai system. Samoans believe that one cannot prosper alone and, when in need, Samoans will look after one another (Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, Bush pg 303. 2004). These beliefs and ideals require much cooperation from all parties, because when the va between these parties is violated or offence enters into the space, both parties are expected to teu le va no matter who is in the wrong. This can be done in the form of an apology from the perpetrator and the releasing of forgiveness by the victim (Airini, 2010). Once the va has been restored, the other components of va that affect the relational space in the aiga
(family), such as va fealoaloa’i (space between parents, siblings, and authority figures) and feagaiga (between a male and a female) are attended to, thus completing the cycle.

This was the case for Lina’s 17 year old daughter who, through secret liaisons in the va fa’a-pouliuli became pregnant to a boy she met in town. Her pregnancy could not be hidden and so when the teenage mother-to-be, came forward to Lina about her predicament, arrangements were made for the two families to meet. At this meeting, cultural protocols were enacted. The boy’s family (aiga) apologised for their son’s behaviour and advised that he would take full responsibility for the Lina’s daughter. Further discussions were made about living arrangements and the eventuality of a wedding later on if the two teenagers decide this was the right for them. The two families agreed that Lina’s daughter would stay with her boyfriend’s family during the week and visits her family in the weekends. The case of the young sibling running away with her boyfriend was resolved in a similar same way, with both aiga settling the matter. As in the case of Lina, the boy’s family also took the initiative to teu le va by holding a meeting and apologising on their son’s behalf.

The next step was for the young girl to teu le va with her own family, which she did by agreeing to live with her father who was stationed in American Samoa on a short-term contract. Despite the feagaiga being violated by the males in these scenarios, and the va fealoaloa’i between the females and their families being dishonoured, the end result indicates that principles of va are consistent. The va fa’a-pouliuli affords opportunities for inappropriate behaviour to occur undetected and for violation of the va to occur unmonitored. Such violations have manifested into situations that have ‘spilled’ out into everyday lives, causing an upheaval in the aiga. Meleisea (1987) defines the aiga as one of the principles of fa’asamoa. The aiga commands the tenets of Fa’aloalo (respect) and tautua (service) that underpin Samoan social structure. These scenarios are deemed a fa’alavelave, an umbrella term that covers certain occasions that require the aiga to come together (in unity, to offer financial and family support) and to ensure the right cultural protocols for the event are fulfilled (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998). Once the va between both parties is repaired, work on restoring relationships within the family begins by way of the perpetrator apologising
for the behaviour and accepting punishment that is given. The final stage of the cycle is each party starts again by respecting family (village) rules and honouring the principles of va.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the place of the mobile phone in the va by illustrating its influence on the mobile va model. The conceptual va model was presented in the introduction to identify the explicit and the implicit areas of va in order to bring context to further discussion throughout the thesis. The colour red indicates the extent to which traditional protocols are observed within these zones. The highest concentration of this colour is in Sphere 1 where no technology is allowed, as illustrated through the New Zealand Prime Minister’s visit to Samoa. Sphere 2 is where every day of village life occurs, and the (perforated) access points (and their width) represent the amount of ICT usage the villagers’ are permitted on a daily basis while remaining within the village rules.

Sphere 3 represents urban Samoa, which comprises the capital, Apia, and its surrounding villages. This is a typical modernised environment in which ICTs are broadly used. Fa’asamoa protocols, although observed, are not adhered to as rigidly as in Spheres 1 and 2. “Fa’amobile” represents the intersections or culture clashes brought about by mobile phone practises in a village setting. Based on my findings regarding in Sphere 3, it appears that a higher level of mobile activity could indicate that fa’amobile is an emerging trend. The mobile va model clearly illustrates that co-presence disrupts the conceptual boundary lines between Spheres 2 and 3. This Evidence of violation of the va in this overlapping space indicates that these ideals are not always sustainable. The influence of the mobile on the va is best illustrated by juxtaposing the standard va model (figure 1) and mobile va model. This juxtaposition shows how the va is vulnerable to violation when mobile practices occur outside of a place of accountability.

Through comparing the characteristics of the va and va fa’a-pouliuli, I establish that mobile practises leading to illicit sexual behaviour and culturally inappropriate relationships only influence these relationships while action takes place in the va fa’a-pouliuli. Overall, this does not change the va, because the va is reinforced when
contesting parties revisit the foundations of fa’asamo, including the village structure and the fa’amatai system that encompass the principles of va. In comparison, the va fa’a-pouliuli does not possess a cultural or supportive system, and so its influence remains in the hidden space. The consequences of these liaisons manifest in real life which instigates the cyclic nature of va through the call to nurture the space in-between (teu le va).
7.0 Main Conclusion

7.0.1 Introduction

This study is the first ethnographic account of mobile phones in Samoa, and is one of just a handful of studies that examines the integration of mobile phones in a Pacific setting. As I described in the Introduction to this thesis, the va is so embedded in Samoan culture that it has become the main focus of this study. I therefore set out to answer the following research questions:

RQ1) Is the concept of va (the space in-between) being influenced and changed by mobile phone practices in rural Samoa?

RQ1a) How does the mobile phone fit into the communicative ecologies of a Samoan rural village, and how does fa’amatai influence place mobility?

RQ1b) How does co-presence influence the relational space (va fealoaloa’i), sacred space (va tapui), and the ideology of feagaiga (covenant) between a Samoan male and female?

This chapter will answer these questions by integrating and connecting the various contentions that were raised throughout the thesis. I present the research findings in two parts. First I discuss my evidence regarding the tangible aspects of va, which encompass mobile phone usage, how the device fits into the communicative ecologies of Island Breeze, and how the ability of the mobile phone to inflect place is inhibited by the village structure. Second I discuss the intangible properties of the mobile phone, focusing on how co-presence implies that
emerging mobile phone practices co-exist within the va. The obscurity of co-presence creates tension and, in some cases, has violated va principles.

7.2 Empirical Findings

The main empirical findings were summarized within the respective chapters: Chapter 3, *Mobile Phones and the Changing Communicative Ecologies of Rural Samoa*; Chapter 4, *The Moral Ambivalence of the Mobile Phone: Forbidden Connections and Secret Conversations in the va*, Chapter 5 *Text Messages From the Grave: The Mobile Phone and the Va Tapuia (sacred space)*, and Chapter 6, *The Mobile Va Model*. This section will integrate the empirical findings to answer my main research question: How is the concept of va (the space in-between) being influenced and changed by mobile phone practices in rural Samoa?

I began my investigation in the village setting. My analysis indicates that, as a traditional rural village, Island Breeze has a rich communicative ecology that includes the fa’amatai system, which embeds the villagers’ use of indigenous methods of communication. The village’s decision to follow indigenous rule over the democratic rule of the current government positions it as a traditional village that continues to practice indigenous means of communication. This context prompted me to ask how the mobile phone fits into the communicative ecologies of a Samoan rural village, and how the fa’amatai influences place mobility (RQ1a).

In Chapter three, I examined how the mobile phone is used in a village that employs indigenous means of communication. By mapping the communicative ecologies of Island Breeze, I found that the fa’amatai system and va strongly influence the slow uptake of mobile phone usage in the village, as well as hindering its place mobility.

The concept of “communicative ecologies” points to how mobile communication takes place within wider contexts of information and communication flows and channels, formal and informal, technical and social. As such, it helps us to understand communication opportunities and barriers (Tacchi, 2014).
Mapping the communicative ecologies of Island Breeze helped me to analyse the indigenous communication systems employed by the village and to understand how the accessibility of the mobile phone corresponds in this environment. The *fa’amatai* system is the political authority in the village and determines the village social structure and governance (Howe 1984, p. 230 as cited by Stewart-Withers 2012 pg 173). It is described by Pacific researcher Tagaloatele Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop as the “socio-metric wheel (fig.2) on which Samoan society turns; this system of chiefly rule was based on a system of rights and obligations whereby all family members shared equal rights to family resources including rights to land and to be the family chief, and in turn, family members used these resources to work to achieve the family good” (ibid 1998, pg 4, 5).

My findings indicate a strong relationship between the *va* and the *fa’amatai* systems’ indigenous communication systems. The latter influence how and when mobile phones are used and show that these elements are the reason for the slow uptake of mobile phone usage in village Samoa. I arrived at this conclusion by mapping the communication ecologies of the village to understand how the mobile phone was used. This helped me to identify localised media objects and know their names and meanings within their context. As I described earlier, terms like “coconut wireless” and *upu fa’aloalo* (words of respect) help us to understand the socio-cultural context in which ‘media’ or the mobile phone is now located. The *va* itself, 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.

Alongside communicative ecology mapping, I adopted Slater’s communicative assemblages in which he adopts the approach of analysing “ways in which new media were entering the wider communicative processes of the locale” (Slater, 2013, pg. 31). Examples of communicative assemblages in Island Breeze includes face-to-face communication, written messages, public transport, church bells, conch shells, and the coconut wireless in which information is spread through word of mouth.
The communicative ecologies of village Samoa are usually independent of mobile technology. The *fa’amatai* system that is embedded in *fa’asamoa* continues its tradition of ensuring the village runs according to traditional village council rules. Although the mobile phone has provided infrastructural benefits, signals can be weak, causing locals to rely more on face-to-face communication. The year 2016 marked a decade of the mobile phone entering the Samoan market. My findings indicate that, at this milestone for the industry, mobile users in village Samoa were still grappling with the cultural, economic, and infrastructural barriers that inhibit the potential of this technology. Due to the richness of the communicative ecologies of the village, these barriers do not impede other means to communicate, and locals continue to use traditional means of communication. In this scenario, the mobile phone remains an alternative.

The socio-metric wheel or *fa’amatai* system is the structure that ensures the village hierarchies and subordinates understand and fulfil their roles. The village rules and protocols are obeyed out of respect and understanding of the order of the village, which is nurtured and encouraged through the *va*. For RQ1, “how do mobile practises in Island Breeze influence or change the *va*?” I found that there is a slow uptake of mobile usage in Island Breeze because communication is heavily reliant on indigenous means of communication. In this context, the mobile phone acts as an intermediary, as opposed to being technology that is central to all communication (Agar, 2013; Goggin 2006). This indicates the *va* works hand-in-hand with the *fa’amatai* system to ensure villagers fulfil their roles and respect the village rules. These rules encompass limits on mobile usage to non-use of the mobile phone, which the communicative assemblages within the indigenous communication system work together to uphold. The empirical evidences indicate the *fa’amatai* system and the rich communicative ecologies of Island Breeze hinder the place mobility of the mobile phone. Rather than dominate means of communication, it acts as an intermediary in the communicative assemblages of Island Breeze.
7.3 Co-presence and the Va

Establishing what mobile phone usage looks like in Island Breeze provides an idea of the complexities of fa’amatai and the va. It compels a unique approach in the study of mobile phones by signifying the tangible and intangible effects of mobile usage on a concept that has a duality of being concrete and imperceptible. Research question 1b highlights the intangible aspects of the mobile phone and how these mediated spaces intersect with the va tapua, feagaiga and va fealoaloa’i. Tui Atua (2009) reminds us that the cornerstone of Samoan indigenous thought is respect for the sacred essence, sacred origins and the beginning of all things. It is this spiritual consciousness that defines the intangible presence of the va. The Samoan indigenous belief that the genealogy of all things connects to a life force whether human, water, animal or plant, they are all descendants of Tagaloalelagi—god of the heavens (Atua, 2009) and relates to all principles of va.

Research question 1b asks “how does co-presence influence the relational space (va fealoaloa’i), sacred space (va tapua), and the ideology of feagaiga (covenant) between a Samoan male and female?” My findings in this area indicate that the intangible properties of va have been used to try to dissuade youth from inappropriate use of the mobile phone. This evidence suggests that the hidden property of co-presence has a stronger influence on the space in-between than do the mobile phone’s tangible properties. The following section synthesises the three empirical chapters (4, 5, and 6) that address these areas.

7.3.1 The Relational Space and the Feagaiga

The section addresses how co-presence influences the relational space (va fealoaloa’i) and the ideology of feagaiga (covenant). This section will discuss my findings regarding the intangible aspects of the mobile phone by reviewing the evidence that shows how mediated spaces influence or change the va.
When I refer to the intangible aspects of the mobile phone, I am referring to the mediated spaces that have been described in other literature as the virtual space, communicative space, presence, or co-presence. This thesis uses the term: co-presence.” defined as the subjective experience of being in one place or environment, even when one is physically situated in another” (Witmer and Singer, 1998). In other Pacific contexts, co-presence has been the catalyst for gendered mobility and the refashioning of female gender roles (Taylor 2015, Kraemer 2015).

Kraemer’s (2015) work in Vanuatu with urban youth demonstrates that, within its gender-ordered society, young females redefine their sociality through mediated spaces. Where young men are permitted to go out freely at night, females are limited to the front yard. Through co-presence, however, the mobile phone provides a way to coordinate secret liaisons despite the watchful eye of adults. In gender-ordered societies such as Samoa, co-presence has been the catalyst for secret relations to occur and often gone unnoticed. Although these mediated liaisons are also reported in other developed and developing contexts (Horst and Miller, 2006, Lipset, 2013), the Samoan context is particular because co-presence clashes with the principles of va, namely the ideology of the covenant relationship (feagaiga) between a male and female or a brother and sister. I now look at the parallels between co-presence and the relational space (va fealoaloa’i) as well as at the feagaiga specifically to show how mobile practises in rural Samoa influence or change these spaces.

In Chapter One I discussed the va fealoaloa’i as the space between all relationships that encourages unity and harmony and, like all values, is nurtured within the aiga and nu’u (family and village). The way in which individuals relate to their family members is the basis of how one relates in the village or community, essentially because the definition of ‘family’ exceeds the palagi (European) nuclear family of two parents and one or two children, since the Samoan aiga is defined by village titles and boundary lines rather than being entirely dependent on blood lines (Anae, 2010, Lui, 2003). In Chapter 4, I illustrated the tension that can occur within extended families that are located in different places through the case of Fale. Sila moved from Island Breeze to Apia for tertiary education
and transitioned from the traditional village environment to urban areas where the *fa’amatai* system is not as rigid or observed as it is in rural Samoa. She was rewarded with a mobile phone so that she could stay in contact with her family in the village. In the city, she enjoyed the freedom to use the device whenever she wanted. Tension occurred when she moved back to the village, where collective rules limited mobile phone usage at certain times. Sila’s father enforced this rule on behalf of the village. After living in urban Samoa with fewer restrictions, Sila found her return to the village frustrating. The twenty-seven-year-old began to resent her father and desire to rebel against his rules, which encroached on the harmony and unity in the relationship between Sila and her father.

An aspect of the intangible properties of the mobile phone is that it is invisible and untouchable, yet present. It is also where my research identified the mobile phone’s strongest influence on the *va*. The *fa’amatai* system exists to ensure that the village is functioning well. It works best when everyone plays their roles. People who hold leadership positions within their family or in the community police others who are subject to the village rules. This enforcement can be through straightforward means, such as the use of the church bell and conch shells to alert the village of where they need to be at certain times. The 5:30am bell tolls for those who need to be at Mass at 6:00am, and the bell sounds again for the 6:00pm curfew, at which time everyone should be off the roads and at home ready for evening prayer. Policing these curfews is possible because the village is small and everyone knows one another. It is easy to identify whether a person is absent or late to a meeting, and it is obvious that a youth playing on the rugby field at 6:15pm is disobeying the curfew. What happens when something with the potential to disrupt the order within families goes unnoticed? Co-presence does indeed occur undetected under the watchful eye of authority, and has influenced the *va* by blurring the lines of the space in-between a Samoan male and female, thus disrupting the ideology of *feagaiga* and the *va fealoaloa‘i* (harmony within familial relations).
As discussed in Chapters 1 and 4, the feagaiga is the Samoan ideal of how men and women are to relate to one another. This standard comes from a time before Christianity was brought to Samoa. The feagaiga placed Samoan women at the highest place in society. Samoan myths and legends of Samoa depict women as powerful goddesses embodying beauty, power, and wisdom (Schoeffel, 1987). The sister’s role is one of honour, and they are “the holders and transmitters of sacred power and the men are the holders of secular power and authority” (Fairburn-Dunlop 1991, p.72 as cited by Stewart-Withers 2012, p.174). Through co-presence, the feagaiga has been challenged through the practise identified as immoral coordination via the mobile phone.

Scholars have found similar instances of immoral coordination occurring in Vanuatu (Taylor, 2015, Kraemer, 2015), Papua New Guinea (Lipset, 2013), and now in Samoa, manifested through a mobile phone promotion called ‘free nights, which villagers believed encouraged youth to stay up all night talking. This practice that made them tired for school the next day, facilitated the development of relationships outside of parental supervision, and left youth open to the phenomenon of “catfishing”. The fact that these practices often went unnoticed by parents for long periods of time emphasizes the influence of co-presence on the va and feagaiga.

My research acknowledges that these types of liaisons existed long before the mobile phone was invented. The mobile phone is not the only way to initiate an affair or co-ordinate a rendezvous with a forbidden lover. In rural Samoa, prior to the arrival of ICTs, written notes or messengers were sent to initiate a relationship or meeting. This research has shown that it has become easier to conceal a relationship from parents, while giving the outward appearance of being a dutiful and obedient child. Hidden activity that occurs in mediated spaces gives the user an agency to create different connections that are not usually allowed in their actual lives. Concepts such as “communicative transparency layers” (Tjora 2011), “inside space” and “outside space” (Gergen 2002, pg.238) and “frontstage and backstage” (Goffman 1959) all suggest that there is a persistent division between that which is presented to the public and that which is hidden from the public eye.
My research makes the same connections as Tjora (2011). In Samoa, activities in which authority is disobeyed often occur in mediated spaces (backstage), but the protagonists appear to comply with household and village rules in their everyday interaction (front stage). This is where the mobile phone has the most influence on the va, because mediated spaces are hidden from view and are therefore hard to police. Even in families with one mobile phone in the house are available, my participants often find ways to ‘steal’ the phone and have conversations with their friends or love interest via the free nights promotion. The phone is returned in the morning with no-one knowing that conversation and plans were being made through the night. The hidden properties of co-presence thereby perpetuate these actions of rebellion that violate the va fealoaloa‘i.

I build upon Slater’s (2013) approach identifying what counts as media in local contexts by naming this mediated space the va fa’a-pouliuli or ‘hidden space’ and placing it in a Samoan context. In Samoa, the practices I refer to as “co-presence” are often described in terms of “secrecy” or “hidden” activities. The word faa-pouliuli can be broken down into two definitions, the causative prefix ”fa’a”, means “in the manner of” (Pawley 1966), ”po” (in this context) literally means “night,” and “uli” means black” or “dark,” with uliuli meaning “very dark.” “pouliuli” and nofo (sit, stay, live) fa’a-pouliuli have also been used to describe a de facto couple living together without getting married,. The term implies that the protagonists are doing negative things done in secret or darkness.

Similarly, va fa’a-pouliuli reflects local perceptions of the negative consequences of co-presence and how the individual addressability (Ling and Campbell, 2011) of the mobile phone accelerates these negative outcomes. My research indicates that the obscurity of co-presence emboldens a sense of liberty and has caused young women in the village to make decisions that go against the household and village rules. This is reflected in the case of Malia (Chapter 4), who used the phone to find a “sponsor” to top up her credit and even began to steal from her family to buy credit so she could continue her hidden relationships with the boys she met at sports events. As I discussed, Malia is aware that she lives a double life. While feeling pangs of guilt for stealing and lying to her family, she
knows that the obscure and intangible properties the mobile phone keep her from being found out. To better illustrate Malia’s actions on the va, I refer to the mobile va model 10a (chapter 6).

Mobile Va Model 10a correlates to front stage, and outside space and can be applied to the perception Malia’s parents have of their daughter’s mobile usage. It is clear that they perceive Malia to be living within the boundaries and rules of village life. They assume that Malia is using her phone within the confines of the household and village rules. This is is illustrated by the neat lines in Figure 10a and the positioning of the mobile within the boundaries of the spherical model. In contrast, figure B represents the inside space and back stage of what is happening in Malia’s world. The tension and conflict that plagues Malia is caused by the ways she uses her mobile phone, which has altered the Mobile Va Model. Malia’s betrayal of her parents’ trust, by stealing money to top up her phone and concealing her relationships mediated via the va fa’apouliuli, is evident in the blurring of the lines in Figure 10b (chapter 6), which represents a violation of the va fealoaloa’i or the relational space between Malia and her family. This reinforces my argument that the mobile phone’s influence on the space in between families (va fealoaloa’i) is strongest in the va fa’apouliuli (hidden space), known as mediated space in mobile literature. Co-presence has facilitated unorthodox behaviour, which creates a breach in the principles of the va fealoaloa’i and the feagaiga. In these vignettes, co-presence has had a negative influence on the va, but has it changed the va?

7.3.2 The Sacred Space

In Chapter 5, Text Messages from the grave: The mobile Phone and the va tapuiia (sacred space), the line of enquiry is concerned with how co-presence influences the va tapuiia. My findings indicate that the va is all-encompassing and absorbs all phenomena including the mobile phone. Therefore, the mobile phone has little influence on the va tapuiia except to challenge the level of respect given to its sacred essence. Samoans believe that the va existed before they did and place emphasis on this va. I found that the embeddedness of va in the Samoan culture is such that it absorbs different phenomena, such as the mobile phone.
This is the premise that locals use to discourage mobile phone usage by the spread of urban legends in which a demi-god from ancient Samoa uses the mobile phone. In ancient Samoa, the *va tapuia* was esteemed as a space between the present and after-world. It is seen as the space between humanity and all things living and dead (Tui Atua, 2009, Anae, 2010, Airini, 2010). Through my investigation I found that, despite Samoa being a Christian nation, the *va tapuia*’s ancient roots influence Samoans through the *aitu* rhetoric, which is being used to discourage particular kinds of mobile phone usage. This influence manifests through the *aitu* rhetoric, which has guided high chiefs and village councils of ancient Samoa. *Aitu* were spirit guides for Samoan villages. They would advise on battle strategies and predict what was ahead. They were believed to belong to the family line. Offerings were given to these gods as a way for Samoans to call upon the *aitu* for their favour in battle, fishing, boat building, the weather, etcetera. Samoans believed in a diversity of gods and had rituals for the different categories. It is the belief that the *aitu*’s power (Schmidt, 2002) transcends the after-world to manipulate whatever and whomever they choose has led to a string of urban legends regarding mobile phone usage in Samoa.

The use of these urban legends as a warning against inappropriate mobile usage has caused tension amongst Christians and those who maintain superstitious beliefs. Samoa recognises itself as a Christian nation and the polytheist ways of the past are generally believed to be no longer relevant. However, despite current monotheist beliefs, *aitu* rhetoric plays a role in combatting the social issues perceived to be caused by the mobile phone. Throughout my findings, I identify that the acceptance of *va* to accommodate all things living and dead, including the mobile phone, has a strong influence in the way the mobile phone is perceived and eventually used (or not used). Despite the device’s inclusion in the *aitu* rhetoric, the mobile phone does not change the way *va tapuia* is perceived, in contrast, it is the very belief that this space has a supernatural ‘power’ gives it a strong influence on the rhetoric to dissuade mobile phone usage. This thesis holds that the mobile phone has no real influence on the sacred space but the locals engage with this sacred essence of *va tapuia* to influence the non-use of mobile phones.
The second part of the first research question (RQ1) concerned whether these mobile practices changed the *va*. To answer the final component of the main research question, this study analyses the third principle of *va*, introduced in the literature as *teu le va* (nurturing the space in-between) to draw out more of the nuances of the Samoan concept of *va* and to support my final conclusion.

### 7.4 The Cyclic Nature of *Va*

To nurture is to *teu*, which translates as to tidy up or to beautify. Any breach in the *va* to should be made tidy or beautiful; in other words, be reconciled. I describe the *va* as cyclic in nature because it is encompassed by the cyclic nature of the *fa'amatai* system, also known as the socio-metric wheel of Samoan society (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 1998). The fulfilment of roles in the village requires everyone to follow correct protocol in certain scenarios, including to *teu le va* where required. The ancient practise of *ifoga* (Macpherson 2005) is evidence of the embeddedness of *va* in *fa’asamoa* and the collective belief that a Samoan cannot prosper alone (Tamasese, Peteru, Waldegrave, Bush pg 303. 2004) This highlights the premise of the third principle of *va* and thus engages its cyclic nature.

This was demonstrated through my interaction with the *Komiti* (Women’s Committee). By shadowing the *Komiti* I witnessed *teu le va* in practise. When someone in the Komiti had violated a rule, they were called to a meeting. During the confrontation, the offender was given an opportunity to *teu le va* through discussion, apologising and accepting the punishment (a fine or demotion to lowest rank duties). The expectation is that unity will be achieved, and often it is a sense of duty to the village hierarchy that is the driver of this objective.

Another example of *teu le va* is mentioned in Chapter 4, where Lina accuses the mobile phone of having a hand in her daughter’s unexpected pregnancy to a secret boyfriend. The unsanctioned relationship violated the *va* between a mother and a daughter, the feagaiga between a Samoan male and female, and also the relationship between Lina’s family and the boyfriends’ family. In the *va fa’apouliuli*, the *va* is violated but the violation remains secret; however, like most of the vignettes in this thesis, such concealed activity is often exposed when it crosses over from the back space into the front space (such as in cases of pregnancy or running away with a lover). The
breach in the va then becomes evident in the front stage. It is under these circumstances that the third principle of va comes into effect, in which the offending parties are expected to nurture the space in-between, just as illustrated in the example with the Komiti member. In the case of Lina and her daughter, it was the boy’s family that began the reconciliation process, approaching Lina and her daughter with gifts of apology and a young man’s resolution to marry his pregnant girlfriend once they were financially ready. Through one party initiating the meeting and the other reciprocating, the va between the two families, the relational space between Lina and her daughter, and the feagaiga are restored. These vignettes illustrate the cyclic nature of va and suggests that while in some instances where mobile phone practises cause a breach in the va, the va itself does not change because the purpose of teu le va is to nurture and restore any breach.

7.5 Contributions to Theory

This thesis made several theoretical contributions to mobile phone literature and studies of culture more generally. As the first ethnographic study of mobile phones in Samoa, it introduced the concept of va, the space in-between, to the mobile phone literature. The va is a Pacific concept that is similar to analyses of relationships carried out within a range of disciplines and topical areas, including anthropology and culture studies (Airini et al.2010), mental health (K. Tamasese, 2004.), the arts (Mila-Schaaf, 2006), politics (Halapua, 2003), education (Anae, 2010, Airini et al. 2010, Suaalii Sauni and Fulu Aiolupotea, 2014, Vaioleti, 2006), health (Tui Atua, 2009, Tamasese et al. 2005 pg 3), and architecture (Refiti, 2013).

This thesis makes broader contributions to our understanding of communication practices as well as contemporary changes in Samoan culture. The thesis provides insights into Samoan culture and how the va influences behaviour in everyday activities and attitudes. In turn, this demonstrates where, when, why, and how mobile phones are used in relation to the va. The research contributes to the va literature through developing the mobile va model, which illustrates the nuances in mobile communication and the tension in the va, particularly in mediated spaces. Additionally, my research has contributed to theoretical va literature through my demonstration of the va’s cyclic
nature, and my analysis of how the principles of the va are mainly influenced in the va fa’apouliuli (the hidden space). These findings were uncovered through the application of a theoretical framework of communicative ecology mapping. My research differs from other studies applying the concept of communicative ecology to mobile phones (Horst and Miller 2006, Watson 2012) because of the indigenous rule of fa’amatai. This framework helped me to illustrate the slow uptake of mobile phone usage through communicative ecology mapping and to identify the communicative assemblages employed by rural Samoans to meet their communication goals. Identifying the village’s communicative assemblages brought context to my analysis of why there has been a slow uptake of mobile usage in the village.

7.5.1 Theoretical Contributions to Mediated Communications

A major topic of the study in relation to mobile phones is the various moral panics associated with the device (Horst and Miller 2006, Lipset 2013, Taylor 2015, Watson 2012) This thesis contributes to scholarly understandings of this phenomenon by providing cultural context for perceptions of co-presence in rural Samoa. Additionally, I illustrate the tension created in the va, particularly in the relational space and the covenant between a Samoan male and female (feagaiga). By naming co-presence in Samoa the va fa’apouliuli, this research builds upon previous studies that developed the notion of a layer of communication that is unseen by the naked eye. My analysis aligns with notions of communicating something in the front space, while concealing other activities in the back space (Tjora 2011). By identifying these hidden spaces my research shows that co-presence has the strongest influence of the mobile phone despite being under the village rule of fa’amatai.

7.5.2 The va and its Implications for Methodology

This research created an innovative approach by combining ethnography with a Pacific methodology called Talanoa which is described as “the ancient practice of multi-level and multi-layered critical discussions and free conversations” (Vaioletti, 2006, pg.24). As discussed in Chapter 2, I fused these two approaches in order to bring balance to the dichotomy of the Samoan culture and Western research culture. Ethnographic research allowed me
to explore different approaches that embodied the values of the Samoan community and enabled me to meet my research goals.

The combination of participatory observation, with the Pacific sensitivities of *talanoa* (Vaioletti, 2006) was a good fit for my ethnography. Using *talanoa* was a key aspect for me as a Samoan researcher. I was entering a space that required me to observe some cultural norms that were pertinent to building research relationships, and *talanoa* allowed me to do this with confidence. In comparing other studies on mobile phones in Polynesia (Peseckas 2014, Russell 2013) the use of communicative ecology mapping would have given context and contrasts into how the device met communication needs of their participants especially with barriers faced by remote SIDS.

### 7.6 Policy Implications

This thesis contributes to Samoa’s national policy by illustrating the effect of the Telecommunications Act (2005) that opened the telecommunications market to private competition. This policy resulted in the Irish-owned, Caribbean-based mobile provider, Digicel, entering Samoa’s market. This thesis illustrates the range of social, economic, and cultural tensions that have thus far resulted from mobile phone usage in rural Samoa. These changes are particularly apparent in traditional villages that emphasise indigenous rule. My research suggests that the Pacific Island Information Communication Technologies Policy and Strategic Plan’ (PIIP) has been difficult for most islands to implement due to isolation of many Small Island developing States (SIDS) with lack of resources and inadequate infrastructure. As a result Samoa’s National ICT Strategy ‘ICT’s for All’ was birthed. Yet these strategic goals have not been reached. In 2006, the Pacific Digital Strategy was developed by the Pacific Forum Secretariat (PFS) after research revealed the intentions of the Pacific Island Information Communication Technologies Policy and Strategic Plan’s (PIIP) was difficult for most islands to implement. PIIP’s vision “to have Information Communication Technology for every Pacific Islander” was inhibited by islands in isolation with lack of resources and inadequate infrastructure. “The Digital Strategy recognizes the role Information Communication Technologies (ICT) will play in the region’s progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (Pacific Plan for Strengthening
Regional Cooperation and Integration 2015, page 2-5). One outcome of the Pacific Digital Strategy was Samoa’s National ICT Strategy which continued with the PIIP vision naming the strategy ‘ICT’s for All’.

My research suggests the expectation that ubiquitous mobile technology will allow Samoans to leapfrog the digital divide is unrealistic. Despite the universalization of mobile technology and the penetration of mobile handset ownership, many Samoans, particularly in rural areas, do not use mobile phones extensively. This is due to a combination of technological, economic, social, and cultural factors. Samoa’s ICT’s For All campaign has a vision to harness ICT as an enabler of social and economic development for Samoa (MCIT, 2005) and two priorities that targeted rural areas were the SchoolNet and Teacher ICT Training and the Rural Connectivity Programme which housed the Feso’ota’i Centre (translated ‘to seek out’). The SchoolNET project launched in 2006, was aimed at introducing ICT to schools with an aim to extend access to the community. The project provided Community Learning Centers (CLC), fully equipped with hardware and software (included pcs, servers, video camera, printers, fax, web camera, photocopier, Internet access). It provided a SchoolNET learning portal with e-resources and learning objects and training for the ICT administrators, training materials, and business planning for managing the centres, as well as one year maintenance of equipment by a local vendor.

Perhaps the Ministry of Communication and Information Technologies could extend their Rural Connectivity project (MCIT, 2005) to include safety around the use of mobile phones to manage the moral panic regarding the ‘catfishing’ phenomenon. It could also utilise the Feso’ota’i Centre’s for youth and adults to be shown how to use their current phones, what numbers to use in case of an emergency as well as teaching how to keep the rural area free from mobile phone litter. The rural villages’ are lush with natural flora and tropical plants and fruits. The addition of a recycling programme for old mobile phones should be another priority for maintaining its environmentally friendly zone. Understanding how these various factors influence mobile phone usage is essential for the development of future policies aimed at increasing mobile use in rural areas.
7.7 Recommendations for Future Research

With Digicel Samoa looking to expand their Smartphone sales (Meese, 2015) it would be interesting to see whether Smartphones will be used in rural Samoa and how the use of social media influences or changes the everyday.

Based on the data I gathered in urban Samoa around mobile use, the areas of interest would be how Facebook and WhatsApp are used in rural Samoa and why would they use them? How do these digital applications influence or change the relational space? (va fea’aloalo’i) within families and how fulltime intimate community (Matsuda, 2005) influences family relationships also, the feagaiga, va tapuia and teu le va are themes to explore in this research.

The previous recommendations I made regarding the MCIT Rural Connectivity project is an obvious area for future research. Given the findings of my research around the non-use of mobile phones in a traditional village like Island Breeze, perhaps some research could be carried out as to what technology is frequently used in these types of villages. The ICT for all project that delivered the Feso’ota’i Centres had focus on ICT’s. I would recommend an evaluation on whether these centres were effective or not. How effective are Feso’ota’i Centres in villages that have low usage of mobile phones? Do Rural Samoan’s have more access to a mobile phone than a laptop or desktop computer? If this is the case (even with low usage) what ways can the Rural Connectivity project use this knowledge to meet their project objectives? While this study focuses on mobile usage in a Samoan traditional village, I was able to undertake some exploratory research in urban areas. This initial urban research indicates that there could be an emergence of ‘fa’amobile’ in urban Samoa, where the mobile phone is being used to substitute communication normally used in a Samoan family context. For example, WhatsApp messaging is replacing the usual practice of Samoan families coming together over a meal or devotion to have family discussions and connect. All participants in urban Samoa were using smartphones. In contrast, few of my research participants in Island Breeze had smartphones, and most who did own them were not able to utilise their full potential due to a lack of
finances to pay for data, and limited knowledge of how to operate these ‘flash’ phones with extra bells and whistles.

Future research into smartphone usage in urban Samoa is needed to compare how mobile phone practices are changing in urban versus rural areas. Such a study could look at *fa’amobile*, a phrase coined in this research to represent changes in components of social structure and agency. *Fa’amobile* asks, if change is a “social process enabled by collective culture” (Wagoner et al 2012, pg5), what intersections or culture clashes can be anticipated? In other words, is the mobile phone being used to substitute communication normally used in a *fa’asamo* context? These themes could be further explored alongside the theoretical frameworks developed in this thesis, especially the use of *va* as a lens of analysis and the perceptions of *va fa’apouliuli* (hidden space) in an urban context. The foundation laid by this research of the mobile phone and the space in-between opens up another lens of assessing ICTs in a Pacific context and perhaps further consciousness and deeper understanding of how cultural constructs can influence the way ICT’s are perceived and used. My intention and hope is the other researchers working in a Pacific context, would consider the *va* as a lens to gain richer context of their participants and their environment.

7.8 Limitations of the Study

My initial research design included a gender balance with my interview participants; however the socially-gendered order of the village made it difficult to hold interviews one-on-one with any males. My work with the *Komiti* also placed unspoken restrictions on my movements in the village. I had to ask permission to shadow the *Komiti*, which I have explained in depth in Chapter 2. Gaining access to the *Komiti* required understanding *fa’asamo* protocols and getting on side with the high chief’s wives, who were the gate keepers to accessing different spaces and participants. My enquiry into interviewing some of the males in the village was always put on hold, and I gathered that it may have been inappropriate for me to interview them without a third party present. This made it difficult to maintain the anonymity of my participants. In addition, I did not know whether a third party would alter the
participants’ responses to my questions. Another limitation of the study was the time restraints on finding and training an interpreter. The original interpreter had administrative experience in New Zealand and Australia, and although she had the capacity and skills to carry out the work, she was unable to take directions from a younger and unranked female. After the third interview, the interpreter would often go off script and paraphrase questions that were pertinent to the research and should not have been changed. The lack of time to find a local to train for the role caused me to take on the interviews alone. This was not generally a problem, as I am fluent in my native tongue; however, it did mean that access to the males of the village was further hindered because there was no third party present.

This limited me to a large female pool of participants and only four males that I was able to access through their wives who were my participants. Three of my male participants were from the capital, Apia, where I interviewed government and commercial employees in the communications sector. It would have been ideal to conduct dual-sited fieldwork in both urban and rural Samoa; however, the time it took to build research relationships and to understand and navigate my way through the fa’amatai of the village was quite considerable.

These limitations were out of my control, but are also part and parcel of ethnography in a traditional Samoan village. Despite these unforeseen limitations, it successfully focused on the mobile habits of women in rural Samoa and the va within the Komiti, aiga (family), and nu’u (village). My focus on shadowing the Komiti and interview the women involved in it provided rich data that has generated some unique findings and conclusions that bring new perspectives on researching technology in Pacific contexts.

7.9 Study Conclusions

The Space In-Between is an ethnographic study of mobile technology and social change in rural Samoa that introduces the Samoan concept of va to the mobile literature. It uses the va or space in-between as a lens to understand the mobile habits of Samoans in a traditional rural village. The use of va as a lens of analysis was pertinent to a study centred around a Samoan traditional village under indigenous rule (fa’amatai).
The unique findings of this thesis are that the uptake of mobile phone usage in rural Samoa is low, and that the *va* and *fa’amatai* contribute to this by hindering the place mobility of the mobile phone. A main contender for inhibiting mobile phone usage is the village’s rich communicative ecology, since this already meets most of the communication goals of the villagers. Another unique contribution this thesis offers is demonstrating the strong influence that co-presence has on the principles of *va*, especially familial (*va felaoaloa‘i*) and covenant (*feagaiga*) ideals of male and female relations. This was illustrated by the first ever mobile *va* model, which represents this influence through the blurring of conceptual boundary lines in the space within this *feagaiga* and *va felaoaloa‘i*.

Current literature on mobile phones in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) offers exceptional findings that describe the communication dynamics within rural developing contexts. My research, with the same objectives, could not overlook the Samoan concept of *va* and how mobile practises affected the space in-between. This cultural construct embedded in the village everyday has brought another lens of understanding to Pacific contexts.
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