

*“No Longer Just a Pastime”:  
Sport for Development in Times  
of Change*

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As you know, what we are giving to the villages [is] sports for developments not only for the good health of the villages, but in the long term we also want to get some, some, sportsmen, some good sportsmen from the, from the villages.

—VILIAMU<sup>1</sup>

In describing sport as “not only for the good health of the villages” but also for the purpose of identifying “some good sportsmen,” Viliamu, a community development officer who spoke to me about an upcoming village consultation during my research in 2011, captured two social worlds of “sport for development” as they have been imagined and practiced in independent Sāmoa (Appadurai 2000).<sup>2</sup> The first of these imagined worlds is set within the context of a region-wide noncommunicable disease (NCD) crisis and obesity epidemic (see, eg, SPC 2011; UN 2010). In this context, the inter/national community has framed sport as an efficient, cost-effective tool to encourage Samoans to adapt healthier lifestyles and to make healthier choices (see, eg, ASC 2012).<sup>3</sup> Through this adaptation, Samoans are expected to move from unhealthy, inactive lifestyles that place a heavy economic burden on limited state resources to healthy, active lifestyles that contribute to the economic growth of society. In this imagined world, it is expected that sport will facilitate this adaptation and release the nation from its burden by enhancing individuals’ fitness levels and thus their ability to reach their full economic, wage-earning potential (see, eg, SDPIWG 2008).

The second imagined world gives life to the development imaginations of those Samoan communities “on the edge of the global” (Besnier 2011).

Set within the context of an increasingly integrated but unevenly globalizing world in which opportunities for social mobility and the attainment of “the blessed life” (o le ʻōlaga fa‘amanuiaina) are often located on distant shores, sport has been painted as an alternative pathway for placing certain young Samoans (and their families) on transnational voyages to economic prosperity.<sup>4</sup> Through this movement, young Samoans, especially young men deemed “academically unfit,” are expected to enter global kinship networks of reciprocity and exchange, ultimately contributing to the development of the ʻāiga (family) back home through remittances (Horton 2012; Uperesa 2010). In this imagined world, it is expected that international sport will facilitate this movement and set families on a course to prosperity by strengthening transnational ties of tautua (service) and thus the full potential of a family’s resource base.

These two imaginaries (one centered on health development and the other on transnational and socioeconomic mobility) exist simultaneously as distinct social worlds embedded within a larger collage of competing development agendas, purposes, and visions. Their interplay is echoed further in Sāmoa’s *National Sports Policy*:

On an individual level, sport enhances and improves general health and well-being by reducing the likelihood of Non Communicable Diseases (NCD’s) [*sic*] such as heart disease and diabetes. It also promotes positive physical, psychological and social development. It is instrumental in the development of individual and behavioral traits such as fair play, ethical behavior, honesty, respect for authority, and leadership. In essence, *sport is no longer just a past time* [*sic*]; *it is now recognized as a means of personal and professional advancement*. (MESC 2010, 10, italics mine)

While the *National Sport Policy* emphasizes globally identified health and social benefits of sport, the last sentence marks another way that sport has been imagined by Samoans to be useful. In particular, the statement points to an older trend of sport and development that dates back to the rise of international Samoan rugby stars like Peter Fatialofa and Va’aiga (Inga) Tuigamala in the late 1980s and 1990s and to the emergence of an American football “Polynesian Pipeline” in the late 1960s and 1970s (see, eg, Horton 2012; Uperesa, this issue). By explicitly naming sport as “a means of personal and professional advancement,” the national policy captures how sport has come to be viewed by many Samoans in the new millennium as “no longer just a pastime” but as an even more pronounced element in long-standing visions of social and geographic mobility.

Echoing critical development scholar David Mosse (2005), the ethnographic question I pursue in this essay is not *whether* local practices of sport for development have actually succeeded in moving Samoan youth into contemporary remittance economies—indeed, international sporting success is more a pipedream than a reality.<sup>5</sup> Rather, the question is *how* heterogeneous entities of sport (people, ideas, interests, and objects) have been brought together in everyday discourse and practice as part of larger ideologies of success. Employing an ethnographic approach, I examine contemporary subjectivities, meanings, and practices of sport for development in order to explore how sport has been “assembled” in the imaginations of Samoans to bring about “something more” (Collier and Ong 2005). Specifically, I illustrate how sport has been positioned as (1) a “ticket” ‘i fafo (overseas) and (2) a viable alternative pathway to the blessed life, especially for those youth not excelling in school. I also demonstrate how these elements have come to reflect (3) a deeper logic of tautua to the ‘āiga, church, and village that helps young Samoans navigate a rapidly changing and uneven global society. In bringing to life this alternate world of sport for development, Samoans circumvent inter/nationally defined paradigms of health and development and ultimately redefine what it means to use sport to become fit and productive citizens.

Data for this paper were collected over the course of two research trips (twelve months in total) between 2010 and 2012 in a peri-urban village on the northwestern coast of ‘Upolu and a rural village on the southeastern coast of Savai‘i in the Independent State of Sāmoa.<sup>6</sup> I conducted a multi-sited ethnographic vertical case study comparing social and discursive constructions of sport as a tool to address Sāmoa’s development needs (see Bartlett and Vavrus 2009). I formally and informally interviewed more than a hundred individuals from government, nongovernmental, sport, education, and community-based organizations, and I supplemented interviews with participant observations during village sport programs and in other sport-related settings such as a Youth Parliament session on sport for development in the capital, Apia. I also conducted a large-scale grounded survey of nearly six hundred students in five secondary schools in Savai‘i to gain perspective on the generalizability and scope of specific findings established through conversation and observation. Combining both qualitative and quantitative data, I sought to crystallize a comparative knowledge of sport for development in Sāmoa across multiple layers of data sources, perspectives, and localities. Drawing on all of this, my research offers insight into a powerful ideology that has located sport for

development within an already existing political economy of transnational migration, further animating contemporary visions of sport mobility in Sāmoa despite the small likelihood of success and the more somber realities of migration (see, eg, Besnier 2012; Grainger 2011; see also Carter 2007 for a comparative case in Cuba).

### THE PLURALITY OF SPORT: SPORT FOR SOMETHING MORE

In my conversations with youth, village leaders, school administrators, and government officials in both ‘Upolu and Savai‘i, sport was often framed as an enjoyable social activity to pass the time. Benefits of participation were often referenced in terms of health and social development themes similar to those promoted by official development programs. Yet these references were hardly ever the stopping point in our conversations; rather, they were almost always a stepping-stone to what my interlocutors saw as more important motivations, such as service to the family. In my grounded survey, a similar pattern of responses emerged, illuminating the degree to which elements of a Samoan sport-for-development assemblage have permeated the collective imagination. I asked students to respond to a four-part open-response question: What is the usefulness of sports for you, your family, your village, and your country? (see table 1).<sup>7</sup>

In their responses, 61 percent of students reflecting on the usefulness of sport in their own lives cited health reasons like “You don’t get sick because you sweat out the bad/poison while playing,” or “Brings down the [high blood pressure] of the [obese] body.” Notably, as students turned their focus to the usefulness of sport for their families, villages, and coun-

Table 1 Percent of Student Responses Identifying Various Values of Sport

Values	for self	for family	for village	for country
Health	61	20	16	9
Socializing	7	21	23	6
Future	24	20	6	3
Youth development	17	5	12	12
Service	0	38	49	75

try, their responses shifted away from health—with only 20, 16, and 9 percent of students acknowledging health benefits for these social units, respectively—and toward how sport allows them to fulfill acts of service (tautua) to the larger collective—with 38, 49, and 75 percent of students noting service functions for family, village, and country, respectively. Acts of service related to sports included earning money to help their families with financial obligations (especially contributions to cultural activities of exchange) and achieving recognition and prestige for their family, village, and country. A sample response: “When you travel [to play sports,] the first question people ask is where do you come from and then you will tell others the name of your village.”

The shift away from health-related responses as students reflected across larger units of analysis is particularly illuminating considering the dominant inter/national discourse around sport’s role in addressing weight-related challenges faced by communities and nations in the Pacific (Kwauk 2011). While students reported that sport is a way to obtain good health, they also saw sport as a means of achieving a blessed future by way of opening pathways to fulfill obligations to tautua, echoing the interplay between the two sport-for-development worlds highlighted by Viliamu and in Sāmoa’s *National Sports Policy* (MESC 2010). As the health and “something more” plurality has become a distinct discourse in contemporary Sāmoa, it is apparent that participation in sport has come to signify a vision of success and achievement very different from the vision of instilling healthy lifestyles initially imagined by inter/national actors. I now turn to an illumination of some of the elements that have helped to assemble this alternate vision of sport for development.

### SPORT AS A TICKET ‘I FAFO: MOBILITY FROM HERE TO THERE

At the core of a Samoan sport-for-development assemblage is the notion that sport has become an avenue that youth can pursue for their futures. Iosefa, a government school principal in Apia, framed youth participation in sport as a way to ensure that they develop useful skills while at school. I asked him what was significant about sport skills, and he quickly pointed to the international arena of professional sport: “Sports can take you places. And I think that’s, that’s what’s happening now. That’s where the target is now for a lot of the youngsters who play sport: to earn a place overseas—or as we said, to gain a ticket overseas. Once you get that, that’s very much the climax of our part [as teachers]. And as I’ve said, they earn

a lot of money! That's a lot of money, compared to what they could have got here. There's nothing here."

While it may strike the inter/national development community as alarming that Iosefa paints the ultimate climax for teachers as sending their students overseas, what is even more telling is his final point that "there's nothing here." Embedded in this gloomy statement is a common characterization of the dearth of opportunities that many of my interlocutors (both those who had lived overseas for a period of time and those who had yet to leave Sāmoa's shores) perceived to have cast a shadow on the futures of young Samoans negotiating their entry into adulthood. For Mikaele, the son of a village rugby coach in Savai'i, anxieties he felt about his future were best illuminated by his struggle to decide whether to return to university in Apia at the start of his second term. While the enrollment fee (WST\$265, or US\$117.40) and tuition (approximately WST\$1,300, or US\$575.90) would have been prohibitive for most families in Sāmoa, the burden weighing heavily on his mind was not a matter of cost but rather the long-term opportunities that continuing university (and thus staying in Sāmoa) would close. He explained:

When we were younger, you always get asked, what do you want to be when you grow up? Y'know? At the time you think you can become anything. But as you grow up in this country you start to realize that there are so many limitations. You start thinking, I wanna be a lawyer. But when you grow up, studying law here is really [impossible]. If you wanted to be a pilot, you can't become a pilot in Sāmoa. Like there's so many limitations. So you start to realize like, reality kinda hits you. And then you realize that living in Sāmoa is like, your options in life are really limited . . . and so you kinda think like, so, if [you] want to achieve this, do you wanna stay in this country? Or do you opt to take another thing which you didn't wanna take? So you're kinda forced to change your course of life, to change your ambition in life.

For Mikaele, returning to university meant tempering his ambitions to a less-than-desirable future. The prospect of spending several more years doing schoolwork to earn a diploma that might give him an entry-level government job in Apia for WST\$8.00–10.00 an hour (US\$3.51–4.39) did not measure up to the idea of leaving university and moving to Australia to work part-time without a university degree for A\$13.00–15.00 an hour (US\$13.54–15.96).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the limited employment opportunities in Apia also meant higher risks of "failing" to achieve social mobility through education and thus of returning to the village to work on the fam-

ily plantation. A future confined to “the bush,” however, merely perpetuated the view that there was no hope on the island.

In the end, not returning to university proved to be more attractive for Mikaele. Staying at home in his village in Savai‘i meant waiting for a “ticket” to follow his older sister to New Zealand. Although this wait could potentially be indefinite, the chance to go overseas outweighed the risk of an agricultural future as well as the more immediate stress of dodging village gossip for returning to the village instead of schooling in Apia.<sup>9</sup> For Mikaele and many of Sāmoa’s increasingly educated youth, the imagined life overseas has shaped their negotiation of where the “target” or destination lies and which pathways they have deemed worth pursuing. Never mind the hardships or realities of the migrant lifestyle (see, eg, Lee 2003); the primary pull factor is the migration itself, highlighting what Niko Besnier has called a “migratory disposition,” or “a logic of life strategies and organized action in which migrating is desirable, possible, and inevitable” (2011, 40). As globalization increases Sāmoa’s integration into the global political economy, pathways overseas have also increased (education, seasonal work schemes, military, sport, etc), heightening the appeal of transnational movement. Yet as these connections deepen, local access has become increasingly uneven across Samoan society, in what geographer Cindi Katz described as a simultaneous process of time-space compression and time-space expansion (2004). Although opportunities to participate in global markets may be increasing, those who have the economic resources, social networks, and human capital within their “transnational kin corporation” are more likely to seize these opportunities than others, pushing global shores just beyond reach for those in positions of less privilege (Macpherson 2004). The idea of earning a ticket overseas on merit or skill alone renders the appearance of a level playing field, creating a mirage of equal opportunity for those in positions of relative disadvantage.

Within this imaginary, the increasing tendency for professional international sports teams to contract athletes from the Pacific Islands has made sports like rugby a popular pathway for those Samoan (male) youth who find themselves on the periphery searching for alternative ways overseas and alternatives ways to success (Grainger 2009; Horton 2012). The news media, billboard advertisements, and television commercials highlighting Polynesian athletic prowess help reproduce the notion that Samoans and other Pacific Islanders have a special place in the making of international sport history (see figure 1), further feeding into the allure of sport (see, eg, Calabrò, this issue).



FIGURE 1 Another Samoan has to fill the gap. Cartoon by Pati. “SBW” refers to Sonny Bill Williams, a rugby footballer of Samoan descent who played for the New Zealand All Blacks squad during the 2011 Rugby World Cup. Source: *Samoa Observer*, 27 August 2012. Reproduced with permission.

Yet it is important to note that the direction, flow, and experience of sport pathways out of Sāmoa, and thus the shape, contour, and color of sport-for-development imaginaries in Sāmoa, have been made possible or constrained by a host of context-specific factors (Besnier 2012). Sport contexts in and pathways out of other Pacific Islands like American Sāmoa, a place socially and culturally similar to the Independent State of Sāmoa, can look entirely different due to the particularities of (trans-)locality (see, eg, Uperesa, this issue). For example, Sāmoa’s colonial history under New Zealand administration, the countries’ special political and economic relationship after Sāmoa’s independence, and the social status of the Samoan diaspora in New Zealand today are all deeply connected to the ways in which sports like rugby and netball (rather than American football or Aussie rules football) have become lucrative elements in long-standing visions

of mobility between Sāmoa and New Zealand. These factors also play a role in the stereotypes, abuse, and misuse experienced by Samoan athletes once in New Zealand (see, eg, Grainger 2011). Furthermore, the presence of a club system in New Zealand and Australian sports that operates independently of universities has rendered academic achievement an unnecessary element in the development imaginaries of Samoan youth wishing to progress through to professional ranks. Thus, this system has given many young Samoan men who have been labeled as “unfit” for school a hopeful alternative way to enter transnational flows of economic productivity, not to mention added motivation to drop out of school (Kwauk 2014).

Indeed, the prospects of global sport combined with the anxieties of a future confined on the island have created a new politics of hope for many Samoan youth (Besnier 2011). These politics are grounded in the physicality of their bodies but are also perpetuated by the material promises advertised by the industrialized world in return for their labor (Besnier and Brownell 2012). Sport contracts with international clubs or sport scholarships to schools in Australia or New Zealand have inadvertently been absorbed into a development logic whereby scholarships facilitate one’s entry into a life cycle of “circular mobility” (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009). While I do not suggest that everyone desires to leave Sāmoa, many of my interlocutors expressed their belief that it was right for youth to view sport as a ticket, especially those for whom traditional pathways of productivity and practices of development had been stalled. Not only did sport represent an entrepreneurial way of expressing one’s “natural” God-given talent; it was also viewed as a means of “putting to work” those youth who had fallen by the wayside.

#### SPORT AS A VIABLE PATHWAY: ALTERNATIVES FOR THE ACADEMICALLY “UNFIT”

Talking about his perceptions of the role of sport in the development of Sāmoa, the Honorable Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi, prime minister of Sāmoa since 1998, did not point to the role sport played in instilling healthier lifestyles in the population. Rather, he spoke to the productive opportunities it gave youth whose chances of upward mobility and service to the family were constrained by their poor performance at school: “Look, sport is very, very important. For us, we have a huge population of unemployed youths. And of course many would not make it to the academic world. So, instead of dropping out of school and [going]

back to the villages, sports provide an avenue for them to find a way to support a family in the future.” In other words, sporting success was perceived to provide a viable alternative for those youth destined to live in the village. This sentiment, I found, was not confined within the stately walls of the prime minister’s office but emerged in many of my conversations with interlocutors located in different levels of society and in different regions of Sāmoa.

For example, as Lupe, a secondary school student in Savai’i and one of her village’s most talented female soccer players, explained to me: “A lot of children in Sāmoa are talented in different ways. Some children are good at school while others are good at sports. [These are] different talents. Most students who are not good in school should pursue a career in sports to help them get an income in the future. Sports is a job, a career, because it’s a way of getting money to help the family.” In recognizing the different talents with which the children of Sāmoa are blessed, Lupe pragmatically positioned athletic talent on the same grounds as academic talent. One is not better than the other; they are merely different. And just as education caters to those who are good at school, sport can cater to those who are good on the pitch (see figure 2).

Although Lupe’s categorization of talent may function to stratify and “track” Samoan youth, it helps to illuminate how sport has been cataloged within a contemporary selection of imagined futures. Sport, like schooling, is something to pursue if it is an area in which you have talent—and, at least according to inter/national media coverage of Samoan athletes, raw athletic talent is something with which Samoans have been well endowed.<sup>10</sup>

While education has traditionally been the primary means of upward mobility in Sāmoa, these opportunities were generally limited to those with the “educational capital” (including social, cultural, and financial capital) needed to obtain coveted scholarships to pursue education overseas (Macpherson and others 2000). Despite the selectivity, education-based mobility carved specific pathways to success in the Samoan development imagination; it also created specific ways of thinking about and preparing youth for such transnational futures. Yet, as it has become apparent that not all Samoan youth can successfully pursue education-based pathways and that not all pathways are contingent on one’s educational achievements, identifying other student talents has become a strategy for youth, educators, and community leaders to maximize success. Sione, a secondary school principal on the outer island of Savai’i, elaborated further on the rationale behind this *de facto* identification system:



FIGURE 2 I don't need to go to school today. Cartoon by Pati. Source: *Samoa Observer*, 4 February 2013. Reproduced with permission.

I think not all the students are academically, you know, academically fit for getting jobs. You know? But maybe five or ten of the school leavers here maybe [get] a chance to go into, you know, a selected team, or a national team in the future. So we usually teach them to think of which suitable way, which suitable pathway that he or she is fit to take, in order to get a blessing for him. A chance for him or an opportunity for him to get a job in the future, or a career. 'Cuz we usually [tell] the students: Sports now is a career!

Sione's emphatic final point—"Sports now is a career!"—summarizes the ways in which sport for development has been put to local productive use in recent decades. In the context of high youth unemployment in which schooling does not guarantee success, students are encouraged to think of the fit between their talents (in the classroom or on the pitch) and suitable careers.<sup>11</sup> Couched within this discourse of "fitness" (both in terms of physical strength and of alignment between talent and career), sport makes possible for those who are academically "unfit" the blessings and opportunities from which they would otherwise have been excluded. For many of my interlocutors in the education and youth sectors, the incor-

poration of sport into local development imaginaries and the identification and strengthening of youth “fitness” have become essential moves in a larger repertoire of strategies to help usher youth into an increasingly uneven and expanding field of work. In fact, during the 2011 National Youth Forum, development officers from the Sāmoa Sport for Development Program (SSfDP) encouraged youth audience members to volunteer for SSfDP activities in order to gain valuable sport skills that would make them more employable. And under the theme “Breaking employment barriers through sport,” Samoan youth participating in a mock parliamentary debate discussed a report proposing legislation to the government to actively support the development of sport in Sāmoa. Policy propositions two and five in the report were: “Promote the importance of sport for youth in order to be one of the job opportunities to earn money to take care of their families” and “Promote sport as one of the ways to decrease the lack of job opportunities.” On a national scale, the notion that sport is a viable career alternative has made sport a popular policy model for addressing Sāmoa’s rising youth unemployment rather than the nation’s rising rates of noncommunicable disease.

From the perspective of government officials, Sāmoa’s integration into the global economy, despite its unevenness, has put Samoan youth at a great advantage compared to their parents’ generation. To these officials, the idea of using sport as a career alternative is a reflection of expanding areas of employability and opportunity. Job prospects are no longer limited to the traditional pursuits of teacher, doctor, or lawyer—although youth like Mikaele would argue differently. Instead, in these officials’ perspectives, youth can pursue careers such as sport that are believed to be easier pathways to a blessed life with better (and more immediate) financial returns. The fact that there have been others who have set this precedence in heroic proportions adds further weight to the belief. Indeed, the visibility of successful Samoan athletes, like Australian-born Digby Ioane and Ben Tapua’i or New Zealand-born Sonny Bill Williams, has transformed the notion of “sport is a career” into development common sense. One representative at the Youth Parliament, lamenting the inadequate education of Samoan youth, even commented: “There are many families in Sāmoa who are blessed, but not all families of our country. Why is this? Because many youth do not see the importance of sporting opportunities to be able to choose a better future through sports.” Here, sport is not only just an alternative pathway; it is an *obvious* pathway that a “smart” youth would have noticed and chosen to follow.

## SPORT AS TAUTUA: REDEFINING THE FIT AND PRODUCTIVE CITIZEN

While conversations with my interlocutors often referenced a migration and development narrative in which sport featured as the conduit to a life of financial betterment, Samoan scholar Sa'iliemanu Lilomaiava-Doktor cautioned against situating Samoan migration strictly within dominant frameworks of economic development (2009; see also Poirine 1998). She argued that seeing Samoans as “passive actors in a game of global labor exchange” and their movement as motivated by economic rationalizations “renders migrants and their communities mute, and the beliefs, values, and attitudes they hold irrelevant” (Lilomaiava-Doktor 2009, 3). Rather, drawing on the late Tongan scholar Epeli Hau'ofa's notion of “world enlargement,” Lilomaiava-Doktor argued for a shift in perspective by examining Samoan migration within the indigenous logics of *i'inei* (here, local) and *'i fafo* (there, abroad), whereby “circular mobility” between *i'inei* and *'i fafo* foregrounds the social space (*vā*) and the maintenance of relationships and connections in that space (*vā fealoa'i*) between people as they move. As Samoan circles of kin and their connection to resources expand beyond the territorial shores of Sāmoa, one can envision a “sea of islands” overlaid and interconnected by a modern-day global political economy (Hau'ofa 2008). Describing Samoan migration as a “culturally informed, historically grounded response to modernity and globalization,” Lilomaiava-Doktor framed development in Sāmoa as a transnational endeavor transcending national boundaries yet rooted in the development of the *'āiga* (2009, 1). At the center of this imaginary is *tautua* to the transnational family, or the global village, and not necessarily movement *'i fafo* (see also Macpherson and Macpherson 2009).

Extending Lilomaiava-Doktor's framework to an analysis of a Samoan assemblage of sport for development, one can see how a larger sociocultural tapestry of service to the family informs Samoan responses to a rapidly changing world. The recurring references to enhanced financial resources and higher incomes do not mean Samoans literally participate in sport-based development pathways solely for economic motivations. Rather, these economic achievements enable Samoan youth and their families to participate more fully and prestigiously in an increasingly transnational (re) production of *fa'asāmoa* (the Samoan way). Kali, a young rugby hopeful from Savai'i but schooled in Apia, put it succinctly: “I know [rugby] helps a lot with families. Like, if I can go overseas, if I can get a scholarship with

rugby I can get paid and I'll use the money to help out my family. I can use the allowance to help my parents or for family obligations, help out with the church, especially the village." As global integration continues, young Samoans like Kali find themselves caught between two expectations: the first is to participate in the formal economy in order to help strengthen the transnational ties between their family and the sociomaterial goods of modernity. The second is the expectation to maintain traditional roles and practices of *tautua* by contributing to an increasingly cash-oriented system of ritual exchange at home. Meanwhile, traditional forms of training (eg, school) and institutions of production (eg, agriculture) have been deemed inadequate for preparing youth to enter and navigate an increasingly transnational political economy. Concerns about youth unemployment are thus concerns about whether and how youth can become productive, contributing members of their 'āiga in an ever-shifting and uneven global society. Combined with the increasing prospects of failure, some youth have turned to alternative means of achieving success and fulfilling their roles as members of their 'āiga. Sport is merely one of these alternatives.

When youth like Kali or Lupe frame sport as an expression of *tautua*, they are inadvertently redefining the fit and productive "citizen" in an ever-expanding Samoan social world. Sport as a ticket 'i fafo and sport as an alternative pathway may illustrate contemporary strategies to connect Samoan youth to global shores, but sport as *tautua* helps clarify how fitness and productivity are ultimately anchored i'inei. It is important to note that participation in sport itself, like migration, is not the act of *tautua*; rather, it is (the possibility of) using the earnings, fame, and social networks gained from one's successful career in sport toward the development of one's family, village, church, or country that is *tautua* (see, eg, Uperesa 2010). In other words, success in sport affords one the ability to actively participate in the maintenance of social relationships, to express one's respect (*fa'aaloalo*) to the larger kin group, and to contribute to the collective health and welfare of the family. Success in sport thus enables youth to engage in meaningful forms of productivity that reflect the strength of the 'āiga in a time where opportunities to do so are limited (Kwauk 2014).

## CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I have unpacked an assemblage of elements breathing life into a Samoan conception of sport for development, demonstrating (like Clé-

ment and Mountjoy, both this issue) how narrowly defined international frameworks—in this case, oriented toward healthy lifestyles—are reimagined in practice. Rather than instilling healthy behaviors into individuals in order to improve their contributions toward the economic growth of the nation, sport has been reoriented in Sāmoa around the ‘āiga in an expanding world of work. This imaginary was best illuminated during a rural sport-for-development training session in Savai‘i. Responding to the trainer’s question “What is sport?” an elderly male participant explained that sport is like “ki‘eki‘e le va‘a” (riding a boat). If ridden and guided with strength, it can take you from “i itu o le sami” (one side of the ocean) to the other. This participant’s metaphor conjures Hau‘ofa’s description of Oceania as a sea of islands where the sea is a “highway between places [rather] than a barrier” (White 2008, xv). It also illustrates the way sport has come to represent a vehicle useful for “transporting” one from point A to point B in this enlarged world. While strength and presumably one’s health are important components of this journey, maintaining the vā and the relationships in that space is even more critical. The fit and productive citizen has thus become the individual who is fit to engage in income-generating activities ‘i fafo to contribute to development i‘inei.

Running through and tying together a Samoan assemblage of “sport as ticket,” “sport as alternative pathway,” and “sport as tautua” is thus not the goal of becoming biomedically healthy—a problematic expectation itself—but rather a sociopolitical reconstitution of the meaning of success, achievement, and development. Sport has become more than a pastime in Sāmoa; it has captivated the development imaginations of youth and their families because of its professed ability to bring prosperity to those located on the fringes of globality. Setting in motion a powerful ideology, this imaginary echoes the “hoop dreams” narrative of the inner-city United States, where underprivileged African-American (male) youth dream of moving out of poverty and away from the margins of society via basketball (see, eg, Dubrow and Adams 2012). No doubt, as with African Americans in the National Basketball Association (NBA), the overrepresentation of Samoans and other Pacific Islanders in New Zealand sports academies and in international sports like rugby union and American football has influenced what Samoan and other Pacific Islander youth have imagined for themselves both in terms of possibilities and limitations (see, eg, Hokowhitu 2008; Horton 2012). Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that despite the mobilizing ideology not all Samoans are able to make it through the (leaky) pipeline from village sport to international

arenas in reality—something of which my interlocutors like Mikaele were keenly aware. In fact, during the course of field research, fewer than a handful of Samoans actually succeeded in securing paid employment or a ticket overseas as a result of their sport skills. Yet despite these long odds of success, Samoan-born sport heroes like the Tuilagi brothers or David Tua—whose achievements are memorialized in the media or by their family’s new television, car, or house—continue to shape a politics of hope (and disappointment) with real implications for Samoan youth who feel they have been marooned by globalization.

A critical focus on sporting assemblages and their constitutive elements thus grants valuable insight into how Samoan youth, like Māori or Solomon Islanders, have become increasingly entrenched in the paradoxical interstices of the “global condition” (Besnier 2012). Caught in the ebbs and flows of sport mobility (or exploitation) and diasporic dispersal, these youth have also become anchored in the expectation of providing worthy contributions to their families and communities back at home (see, eg, Lakisa and Mountjoy, both this issue). Further ethnographic inquiry into the implications of “failure” is called for, particularly for those men whose athletic careers never took off or have been cut short by injury. Additionally, while my interlocutors often talked about sport-based futures as something for everyone, it is critical to explore the implications of this development strategy for those girls and women for whom sport has been implicitly deemed an inappropriate pursuit. As sport-for-development programs continue to multiply in Sāmoa, it is essential to delve more deeply into these issues, especially the politics lining the disjuncture between inter/nationally identified development goals and those prioritized locally by Samoans (Kwauk 2014). As alluded to in this article, the reformulation of sport for health into a strategy for navigating a rapidly changing world and for serving the family leaves unchanged the problems that contribute to obesity and noncommunicable diseases in the islands and leaves unchallenged the assumptions driving a sport-for-health framework in the Pacific (Kwauk 2011). It is thus an urgent issue for Samoans and members of the inter/national development community to explore together how heterogeneous ideas such as improving health, negotiating the *vā*, and achieving status for the *‘āiga* can be radically reassembled under a locally defined sport-for-development agenda aimed at transforming the unevenness of an ever-expanding social world.

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK *Fa'anofa Lisaclaire Uperesa and Tom Mountjoy* for organizing this special issue and for coordinating the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania group that helped make this paper come to life. I would also like to thank the three anonymous reviewers whose comments helped strengthen the manuscript. All shortcomings are, of course, my own.

## Notes

1 All names used in this paper are pseudonyms unless permission was given to use real names.

2 I use the term “sport for development” to refer to what Bruce Kidd (2008) has called a “new social movement” in international development and humanitarian aid in which sport is used as a tool to achieve a wide range of goals, including the elimination of poverty, the prevention of HIV/AIDS, or the empowerment of women.

3 I use Leslie Bartlett and Frances Vavrus’s term “inter/national” to signal the blurred boundary between international and national actors (2009).

4 I use the term “blessed life” rather than “good life” to highlight the religious connotations often reflected in my interlocutors’ constructions of their ideal imagined futures. See Macpherson and Macpherson 2011 for more on the significance of religion in the worldviews and social and economic practices of Samoan society.

5 Moreover, collecting data on the actual impact of remittances sent by Sāmoa’s overseas athletes on their individual families or Sāmoa’s national economy would be an incredibly difficult task (see, eg, Horton 2012). As such, the notion that success in international sport leads to the “emergence of wealth from nothing” should be viewed as a socially contested myth (Besnier, this issue).

6 Field research was generously funded by a University of Minnesota Office of International Programs Pre-dissertation Grant, an International Thesis Research Grant, and a Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship.

7 In the Samoan translation, I used the word “aogā,” which could be translated literally as referring to the “usefulness” of sport, or, perhaps more accurately, to the “value” of sport.

8 At the time of writing, the national minimum wage in Australia was A\$15.96 per hour (US\$16.64); for junior employees 19 years of age, it was A\$13.17 (US\$13.73). In Sāmoa, the national minimum wage for employees over 18 years of age was WST\$2.00 per hour (US\$0.88).

9 Within seven months of our conversation, Mikaele received an opportunity to join his sister in New Zealand on a temporary work visa sponsored by his uncle.

10 The racialization of Samoan athletic talent is a point to be problematized further, especially in terms of how it perpetuates the perceived viability of sport as an alternative pathway to the blessed life and the further “deschooling” of Samoan youth (see, eg, Hokowhitu 2003; Tengan and Markham 2009).

11 Because of Sāmoa’s strong informal and subsistence economy, it is difficult to determine the country’s “real” unemployment rate, although in 2011 the Samoa Bureau of Statistics estimated an unemployment rate of 5.7 percent (SBS 2012).

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### *Abstract*

In the midst of a noncommunicable disease (NCD) crisis, sport has emerged as a popular public health strategy across Oceania. Promising to turn unhealthy, obese bodies into fit, productive bodies, sport-based health programs are supposed to contribute to the economic development of Pacific Island nations. In Sāmoa, however, these efforts have been complicated by an existing web of meaning entangling sport within the transnational realities of Samoan families. Drawing from twelve months of multi-sited, ethnographic field research on sport for development (SFD) in Sāmoa, this paper demonstrates how Samoan understandings of sport reshape what it means to be a fit and productive citizen. Specifically, I illuminate (1) how sport is perceived as a “ticket” overseas and (2) how sport is perceived as a viable alternative pathway to the blessed life, especially for those (male) youth not excelling in school. Finally, I discuss (3) how SFD is a sociocultural response to a shifting transnational political economy of tautua (service) to the family, church, and village rooted in an unevenly expanding social landscape of mobility and work. This paper contributes to anthropological conversations on contemporary sporting formations in Oceania by highlighting how sport is reimagined and repackaged by Samoan youth, education leaders, and government officials as a development tool to create healthy development futures.

KEYWORDS: sport for development, education, migration, youth, Sāmoa