NARRATIVE SURVIVAL IN THE TONGAN DIASPORA:
The Case of the American Deportees

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The Kinikini Family
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and all in the Belly of the Beast, everywhere
to Rachel, Baby Theo and to Laura and Lei‘ali‘i

Mahalo’s to
Terence, Mike & Jon
A DEDICATION

Tuonga’ane

Mother and Father molten a third form from vapor
My sisters and I were vibrations then,
Lionesses in formation
Calm visions between the dreaming of my brothers,
those tumultuous bands of strength
tormented contenders for a father’s throne.
They pound the root with salt and skin
And circle those who know and feel it too
Come, drink the bitter vai.

In Memory of Kafoa and Etuini

Rest In Paradise
The Birth of a River

I sit down on the banks of ancient waterways from mountaintops to estuaries I’ll never see
Stirring up currents contained by two arms of far-reaching land streaming longer than memory
and wider than the bending of time over land, over sea

S
omeone once told me that the Ancestors navigated the deep blue by hopping on currents that were like rivers cutting ordered pathways through the chaos of the deep blue sea. These rivers would transport a vaka from one island to another, like a highway from place to place. Discourse, like rivers, has a flow and a rhythm, a linear direction, and discourse transports consciousness from island to island (Delueze and Guittarri might call these “plateaus”). Finding the flows and patterns in the chaos is how universities have come to create discourse. ¹ We have a number of tools at our disposal—old maps, texts and lists of instruction that we use to crop patterns in the chaos we sense, to codify and differentiate them, order them, name them and ultimately feel like we own

¹ And not just any flow or pattern, but flows and patterns which speak to the political times; or in other words, the flows that serve the powerhouses that fund universities.
them. A friend told me that tapa cloth\textsuperscript{2} was once used as a space of inscription for Navigation maps...that our Ancestors did write down where we came from, where we were going. We did write our history, our story. We need now to learn to listen and learn to read, for their inscriptions are coded, and cannot be understood through any other means but through the loto—the heart. Let us open our eyes to the story, and listen with our hearts.

\textit{Lalava and Steel Water}

\textit{What can be written in ink can be written in string}, Tongan artist Filipe Tohi has said. \textit{Ink is steel water}\textsuperscript{3}. The Tongan art form of lalava is a \textit{narrative} practice—it tells a story of who we are and where we came from. Lalava is a concrete manifestation of Tongan knowledge. Through it you can experience the collective rhythm of the Tongan people, existing as a rhythmic synthesis of geometric shapes and signs. These master building codes are recognizable intuitively through a genealogic awareness: you will know when you see it and you will know for \textit{it} will seek \textit{you} out. If you share the genealogic awareness, you will know it for you will have seen it before. Artist Filipe Tohi shares with us:

\begin{quote}
I have trained in the Tongan art form of lalava, the decorative sennit lashing that was used on houses, canoes, and tools. Thousands of patterns were created by wrapping black and brown ropes into complex geometric forms while
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{2} Tapa cloth is made of pounded bark, used for decorative and ceremonial purposes. It is found in many parts of the Pacific, but is widely used in Tonga.

\textsuperscript{3} I heard Filipe Tohi present at the Tongan History Association Conference at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City in Spring 2001, where he told us that in the lalava is the code of life.
they served to bind two beams or structural elements together. I often explore the possibilities of this technology in regards to sculpture, particularly in large-scale stainless steel forms. I have identified a visual language within the lalava that was not only used by our ancestors for voyaging, but it communicated principles of cultural knowledge and history. For me the sennit patterns of the Pacific convey our memories and experiences as well as carry us from place to place.⁴

Lalava, a practice immemorial and collective, was carried with the Ancestors in the lashings that bound the vakas during their migrations into te moana—the deep blue space and final frontier. Lalava stored knowledge, it was one of our Ancestral libraries—not only waterproof but survival-proof, based on principles of eternity and passed down from generation to generation in narrative form—in a story that is passed from one practitioner to his or her Apprentice. Replacable knowledge, portable, transmittable from body-to-body. It is a knowledge are embedded in narrative forms and practices. Water has everything to do with the rhythm of lalava, as do constructs of time and space which radically disrupt Western constructs unleashed within the shifts of the Enlightenment towards what reggae artist Bob Marley has called a “technological inhumanity” and rap group Gangstarr calls “tricknology”⁵. Tohi speculates that if we were to cut into the lalava, and translate it from three dimensional materiality of kafa we would find a one-


⁵ From the Gangstarr album entitled *Moment of Truth*. 
dimensional productive space such as paper, on which we could see inscribed the same knowledge using rhythms of steel water (ink) instead of kafa (sennit cord).

My search for principles of Tongan knowledge has led me to interrogate the nature of knowledge, especially the nature of knowledge in Western academic settings and Western discursive practice. It is a search that invariably finds me treading through murky memories and fishing out soggy remnants from blue ether and hoping that the steel water we call ink bleeds into a sensible arrangement on this paper. I am cutting into lalava...

Are all waters connected? If I enter this river over here, can you feel my presence in that sea over there? Do all rivers flow towards estuaries I’ll never see? Growing up on the banks of the Spanish Fork River in rural Utah, I was raised in the freshwater, springtime runoff from snowcapped Rocky Mountains. The sound of flowing waters permeated my senses during my formative years while watery thoughts ran their course through my airy mind. Water formed my sensibilities, formed how I perceive and learn the world around me. The Spanish Fork River is an ancient waterway that now finds itself in the American West. As a child, I could feel he was old, could feel the traces of ages, taste his genealogy mapped upon his watery skin, smell it in his rock-bed backbone, and hear it in his riverbank arms that rubbed up against a winding course.

Discourse appears as a river, appears to have a beginning and an ending, but water is eternal, water is always in transformation. Discourse which has wrongly been limited to a narrow selection of narrative forms deserves to be recoursed, widened to banks of a way of knowing that survives, that survives with the eternal nature of knowledge.
Recoursing discourse is a literal *returning* of epistemic rivers to pathways and bankways that have existed anciently throughout Oceania and amongst the Peoples of the Sea.

On Halloween Eve 2004, the Manoa streambed enacted a literal recoursing of its waters when its banks brimmed with runoff from a powerful downpour—10 inches in a matter of hours—and found that its ancient overflow pathway was now home to the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa’s Hamilton Library. Did the power of the library of Western knowledge displace a river? The river—coursing according to ancient knowledge banks stored in the landscape—knew where it was meant to go, and it did. Within a few short hours, the library experienced massive damage to the tune of $20 million dollars. Particularly hard hit was the basement, where government documents and old maps were stored, *irreplaceable maps*. Maps of a kind of knowledge that can’t be replaced, a knowledge that can’t be re-placed, that can’t be dis-placed, a knowledge of no-place...a place is the space any body takes up, and this knowledge was out-of-body. Its too bad knowledge doesn’t spring eternal. *Unless it does.* It’s too bad knowledge can’t be re-placed. *Unless it can.* Sad to say, but I smiled when I heard what the stream had done, not just smiled but felt a calm from the inside out. I couldn’t believe that the stream was speaking so *directly* to the community. When the knowing of the land, sea, and sky (earth has her own order and epistemology) from time immemorial are ignored, impossible imbalances result.

As the stream tells us, the universe has an intuitive intelligibility, apprehended by and through the senses. This is sort of knowing is the work of the spirit, and recognizing such spirituality and knowing is one way of experiencing what Manulani Meyer calls an Hawaiian epistemology, an Hawaiian way of knowing: “We can know through our
bodies, our bodies become instruments of knowing...Knowledge, then, is something we cause" (2001:133). We cause knowledge and knowledge in turn causes reality.

Scientific approaches to knowing often crop intuition and feeling, spiritual tools that Oceanic epistemologies are predicated upon. I’ve long had deep suspicions of scientific games of true/false. When beginning this project, I never intended to conduct my research as a means to merely collect data towards an end product of facticity. I wanted to do something different, I wanted to experience the many ways we can sense, feel and know a thing, and not just know if it is true or false. I draw inspiration from Lyotard in his book *The Postmodern Condition*, who says that “scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with, another kind of knowledge, which I will call narrative (1984:7). Lyotard posts that scientific discourse, far from being the only way of knowing, can actually be seen as a only part of the narrative family, “a variant in the family of narrative” (ibid:7). He finds that in the scientific games of knowledge production, knowledge is confined to “proofs” (what is true/false). In “prescriptive” games of knowledge production, he finds that knowledge is put to the service of the subject, “[allowing] morality to become reality” by offering ethical wisdom (what is just/unjust) (ibid:36). Both scientific and prescriptive knowledge both somehow abstract, out-of-body games of legitimation—must be taken back into a narrative root, back into the story of a human being, back into the genealogic chain. Lyotard says, “knowledge finds its validity not within itself, not in a subject that develops by actualizing its learning possibilities, but in a practical subject—humanity” (ibid:35).

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6 I address what I mean by “genealogic” in the chapter called “Genealogy: A Bedtime Story”.
It is the human story
that gives knowledge breath, which is why
the human breath in the form of words
is how rhythm and knowledge manifest.

We are spoken into existence.

Knowledge is transferred through
the breath of life, the ha,
through the story and word
the word in breath.

Likewise, Benitez-Rojo finds that narrative practice of the People of the Sea\(^7\) is a way of knowing that \textit{encompasses} scientific forms, and most importantly that provides its own legitimacy through the breath, the word, the ha:

\begin{quote}
...narrative practice of the Peoples of the Sea is very different from the West’s narrative of legitimation since in the latter the problem of legitimacy is the subject of an extended process of inquiry, verification, and comment, while in the former \textit{the story itself instantly provides its own legitimacy whenever it is spoken in the present moment in the narrative’s rhythmic voice}, whose competence lies only in the speaker’s having listened to the
\end{quote}

\footnote{He refers to the Caribbean specifically. However, the waters of the deep blue transmit mana within the rhythm of vai, so his ideas can be transferred fluidly between the Caribbean and Pacific. Indeed Peoples of the Sea share similar temporal-spatialities, tava.}
myth or the fable issuing from someone’s mouth. (1992: 168, italics mine)

It strikes me that the narrative knowledge that both Benitez-Rojo and Lyotard speak of bears strong genealogy with the Polynesian practice of “talanoa” —a storytelling form found in Tonga, Samoa and Fiji, amongst other places. Dr. Sitiveni Halapua, Director of the Pacific Islands Development Program at the East-West Center in Honolulu, has been pioneering a “Theory of Talanoa” for use in governance⁸. Talanoa, as a political process, involves what in Western politics would be considered “informal dialogue”: no set agendas, no time limits, no schedules, or other formal posturing common in modern political performances. Dr. Halapua has been intimately involved with the planting and nurturing of Talanoa in current Oceanic politics. He moderated the Talanoa sessions following the 2000 Coup between estranged political leaders in Fiji and most recently conducted a Talanoa between oppositional camps during the Civil Servant Strike in Tonga in July and August 2005⁹.

Dr. Halapua translates “Talanoa” as “to speak without concealment”. “Tala” means “to speak” and “noa” is the Polynesian word for “zero”. It is a mode of speaking that has no specific beginning or ending point, and can encompass a wide variety of topics and modes of speaking. Throughout Polynesia, there are a wide variety of

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⁸ I heard Dr. Halapua present his Theory of Talanoa at the East-West Center in Honolulu in Fall 2003. His work in Pacific regional governance has been substantial and been concentrated on the Indo-Fijian political talks in Fiji following the 2000 Coup. See “Walking the Knife-edged pathways to Peace,” in *USP Beat*, Marketing and Public Relations Office, University of the South Pacific, 8 July 2003.

⁹ The New Zealand arbitrator that was sent over quit after a stalemate of five days, the newspaper headlines read: “Strikers Refuse Offer, Await Talanoa”. Halapua landed in the Kingdom and within two days of Talanoa, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Public Service Commission and the striking civil servants.
formalized, ceremonialized speech, but Talanoa is the one form that is open-ended and free-flowing. Because of this, Talanoa allows the speaker and listener to discuss multiple connections and associations by a stream of consciousness approach, and its legitimation is found in the fact that it is being spoken “in the present moment in the narrative’s rhythmic voice, whose competence lies only in the speaker’s having listened to the myth or the fable issuing from someone’s mouth”, to put it in Benitez-Rojo’s words.

Talanoa is oriented towards an open-ended access to bodies of knowledge. In Talanoa, all roads don’t just lead to knowledge, all roads are knowledge. In Talanoa there is no unproductive exchange—all utterances are productive. You can talk about anything: mangoes or gravity and still be productive. No talk is idle, not even “idle talk”. Talanoa frees up space for a nomadicism not present in stickier forms of narrative. Talanoa allows breathing space in the production of knowledge, and places the speaker and listener (the people as opposed to a topic or subject) to be the anchoring for the exchange. Talanoa keeps the humanity in the production of knowledge. Talanoa emphasizes the equal importance of speaker and listener and Talanoa requires that participants use their loto when listening—their hearts, because the heart is the true seat of knowledge.

By embracing Talanoa as my research methodology, I am invoking an Oceanic epistemology, an Oceanic way of knowing, drawn from the oral rhythms of the Peoples of the Sea. Talanoa opens the unleashing of narrative knowing and connects us to a thousand seemingly disparate storylines that bend, and connect...so come, let us talanoa pe...
Narrative knowledge, accessed by a Talanoa process, is transferred body-to-body from speaker to listener. Narrative knowledge is based on the eye-witness account, and is legitimated at the moment of utterance, allowing for the breathing (ha) and beating (ta) of the human condition. Thus narrative knowledge takes us from the partiality of scientific denotative utterances (true/false), to the out-of-body executory indictments of justice and ethical wisdom (right/wrong) and into movement, into social action—into reality through a direct witness (I feel/I see). In the final analysis, we are nothing without a witness. In the final analysis, without humanity, knowledge is nothing.

Listening is the key in narrative knowing and in Talanoa. Listening is the key of intuition. When we listen, we allow ourselves to turn inwards, crossing ourselves in an exchange with another person across the productive space of the circle. Knowing how to listen is just as important as knowing how to speak. And both are needed in knowing how to Survive. I concur with Lyotard when he says that narrative knowledge cannot "replace" scientific knowledge. They function for different reasons and we need them both. We need scientific narratives to tell us what is true and what is false, else how could we determine what is real and what is not real? Likewise, we need prescriptive narratives to tell us what is just and what is unjust, else how could we determine what is wrong and what is right? But most importantly, we need a human story, to root back to. We need "narratives" to finally determine who we are and where we’re going—the “real situation” (as Bob Marley says), the real story, the eyewitness accounts. Narrative is how we speak our stories and legitimate our own myths on a personal and group level, and narrative is how we witness and respond to another person’s story. They remind us of our wholeness and they lessen the anxiety that we might be alone in the wide world. Each witness,
those who tell and those who listen, bring the narrative are back to the central healing power of the genealogic—a logic that roots each fractal into an organic whole.

Narrative practice, or the ways in which we express our stories, trace their form along pathways of collective rhythms and immemorial memories. They are posted existentially in an eternal moment rather than in a specific localized temporal-spatiality. In and through narratives, the collective past is summoned not as stable images drawn from doors of the past or windows of the future, but as a productive enlargement of the moment, a production Gaston Bachelard calls a dreaming or a “consciousness of enlargement”:

In this meditation, we are not “cast into the world,” since we open the world, as it were, by transcending the world seen as it is, or as it was, before we started dreaming. And even if we are aware of our own paltry selves—through the effects of harsh dialectics—we become aware of grandeur. We then return to the natural activity of our magnifying being. (1994:184)

Which is why we can say, “Tongans never die”. “Tongans never die” because their narratives of life and death are open-ended, not terminal. Our narrative practice of conferring and bearing ancestral names, Names Immemorial, creates a suture of being in the temporal-spatial rupture called death. Death’s rupture becomes a line along which a seedpod splits to release its seeds. The bearer of the name continues to live the narrative of the Ancestor whose name he or she bears. This naming narrative calls into existence the Ancestor, adding another node in the living, breathing map of genealogy. Bearing the
name of an ancestor summons one into the immemorial space beyond tracing, or retelling and into a tapu state—a fixed point, a center point, an eternal life. This same logic goes for ruptures of displacement: migration or exile. Wherever we went, we used a narrative of renaming landscapes and seascapes, effectively marking dismantling points in time and thus creating a stable center space. That is why we can find the same mountains in Hawai‘i as in Tahiti, or why, for example the Ancestral homeland of Hawai‘i/Hawaiki/Savai‘i is meticulously remembered throughout Polynesia.

Such narrative mapping activates a breathing flexibility and living extension of the temporal-spatial fabric. This is how narrative can change reality. Because of the breath, the ha, involved in narrative knowing, it can change our reality. That’s why our narrative practices will be the key to our survival. Narrative mapping unleashes a dismantling of time and opens up the space for the migration of the faculties of sense, the tools of epistemology. Like Manulani Meyer, I believe that the aforementioned narrative practices are based on Oceanic epistemologies that are “long term idea[s] that [are] both ancient and modern” (2001:126). Peoples of the Sea, like peoples everywhere, belong to ancient shapes and forces—genealogies, cosmologies and technologies that are transmitted in narrative forms genealogically. They are the rhythms we are born into, the culminating spiritual force that has been in a process of alchemical creation directly resulting in the existence of our being.

*Rhythms like the ancient Tongan canoe chants.* Such chants are still used today when paddling, rowing or when hauling heavy loads. They contain words are so ancient that their meaning has been shrouded by time. Despite this, they continue preserved in the song and remain intelligible to the senses of those who sing them, or those who enact
that narrative in any given moment, *having experienced this song before*. The rhythm continues to be not only a cultural or narrative practice but also serves to connect the present generations to a distant epistemic shore (an Ancestral way of knowing).

Take kava for example. *The root of all roots*. For a quick minute, just sit back, and *Feel kava*. Kavatonga is an Ancient narrative practice in which Tongan men (and occasionally women, as in the case of the tou’a in which a female serves the kava) join together to share in the type of collective dreaming that Bachelard speaks of. Through the practice, one may experience epistemologies passed down from generation to generation. Manu*, a state-raised deportee says that as he took up kava, he received a pouring out of Ancestral wisdom:

What I did was, I started drinking kava... *and then you hear* ‘em. When the old folks conversate, they got wisdom, you know. They got wisdom about Tonga, you know about how it first started. When they start talking about back in the days, all my interest is just on them, and I be listening. You hear ‘em, when they talk about certain clans, you know they call them ‘clans’—ha’ a. *So that’s how I be learning.*

In regards to the survival of Oceania and its Diasporas, our prescription is to simply do what Manu did: *listen*. Listen and feel what emerges, see what dreaming opens up: *When they start talking about back in the days, all my interest is just on them, and I be listening*. Listen to the rhythmic voice of the narrative. Listen to the stories and learn to

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* Name has been changed to protect identity.
10 Talanoa Session, 4/4/05.
feel the rhythms of the roots from which we have sprung. *This is the work of genealogy...listen to the roots.* What the roots speak is heard only in the heart. The heart is the true seat of knowledge. ∞
In screenwriting, they have what’s called a “logline”. A logline is the sentence or two that summarizes a story’s content. It is what appears in the TV Guide. If I had to write the logline for this thesis it would be this:

Twenty-something year-old Polynesian thug is deported by the US Government to an isolated island homeland he left as a baby. Will this young, criminally minded, American-
bred, ex-con find adventure and peril in a strange land or self-discovery and a redemption of his Roots? Will his fellow countrymen and women welcome him with open arms? Or will he become an exile in his own land, a prophet in his own country? How will this line bend and return to the Root?

When beginning this thesis, I had intentions to write a screenplay, a narrative of images written in steel water. But one thing led to another, mostly lazy things, and I’ve ended up writing a thesis, more boring (as the last chapter showed), but perhaps safer, more appropriate for this telling. But if this thesis were a screenplay instead of a thesis, I would project one moving image to illuminate the visual axis upon which this story hinges. The image would be the profiled silhouette of a Warrior—long hair wrapped in a tight topknot, arms tensed and wrapped around some type of weaponry, poised to strike a violent chord. His form falls along lines and lateral squares, and he stands prepared to kill and be killed for what he loves—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, perhaps. As his silhouette begins to move across the screen, we see him tense and lift arms, ready to strike. In a moment, however, we cut to reveal his weaponry to be a tall digging hoe, the kind the Ancestors used, and we realize that the Warrior is lifting arms to rhythmically pierce the rich island soil. He stops for a moment, and bends down on one knee, placing a root cutting into the ground. As he bends, his salt and sweat fall into the soil and begin to nurture the root.

With this image of the Warrior in our imaginations, we begin to prepare our senses for the story that follows. Our deported hero would have grown up somewhere in
between a "traditional" Tongan household and the "modern" institutions in American life—public schools, juvenile correctional facilities, and finally, the Belly of the Beast itself—America’s ever-expanding prisons. But in between home and the institutions of American discipline, he found his flows and improvisations resonated the best on the streets. Growing up as a youngster in America amongst other minority groups, he called upon his Tongan genealogy to create an identity that was his main source of light and of pride. In a big pond, his Tongan identity set him apart, and he made very big waves. His street flows and improvisations were based on a reversioning of Tongan rhythms. His line, he knew, was from a strong root—a Tongan root.

His powerful heart took him far in the spoken logic of the streets, made him well-known and respected—even feared—by all other sets. The streets, organic underneath the layers of concrete and urban decay, are always in growth, and the forces of the streets are based on the politics of the word. The streets have a narrative knowing that endows its subjects with a defiant counter-code to resist coding machines and machines of capture. The streets offered comfort, relaxation, and a way of being in which life was somehow free.

Coming up inside of America’s twisted dream logic, he used his mana as a youngster to become a gangster having fun, a thug run amok...he chose to become a street hustler making fast (albeit risky) money, and by so doing, he chose to reject the options of indentured servitude in the stagnant economic positions of the working poor. He holds a position of resistance—he is a Warrior and he feels this warring through a genealogic. Thus, at times, his paths turn violent and ugly. Through plot twists and fated encounters our hero works his story. However, as the saying goes, the path of the streets
ends in one of two places: death or prison. For our deported hero, the moral of the story is shrouded in grey: he escapes the death traps of the streets and is sent to prison, only to be released from prison with an “expedited removal order” from Uncle Sam—in other words, a deportation order, an exile from the only place he knew. He is transferred to an INS holding tank filled with other illegal aliens, and after a short time two federal INS agents escort him on a one-way flight to a Pacific island paradise in the sun called Tonga, a place our hero hasn’t seen since he was a baby. Welcome to his world.

This synopsis is inspired by real stories of Tongans that have been deported by the US government. Approximately two hundred “criminal deportees” have been removed from US prisons and returned to the island Kingdom of Tonga. Tonga, with less than 100,000 people, consists of over 170 islands and lies in the South Pacific, right next to Fiji and Samoa, Northeast of Aotearoa/New Zealand. For four months in 2005, I returned to my father’s homeland, Tonga, to live and gather research material with which to write this story. I wasn’t looking for statistics, or numbers, or data of that nature. What I was looking for were stories, which are made of a mixture of fact and fiction. Although my research might be classified as ethnographic, based on oral interviews with twelve deportees, this thesis is not meant to be read as an ethnography nor as an autobiography, although elements of both are present. Rather, this thesis is meant to be read and experienced as a narrative, simply as a story. Through narrative bits and sequences, you begin to be exposed to what might be called the aura that I, as a writer, see and feel around the Tongan Diaspora in the US, irrigated through the experience of a “criminal deportee”. It is one of the stories that I was born to write.
In screenwriting, they have what’s called an “Inciting Incident”. It is the occurrence that creates the conditions of possibility for the telling of the story. If time were a line, I would hold up two points to represent my own Inciting Incidents that inspired me to put pen to paper and write this story. I would lay down the kafa (cord) in between those two points and say, “This story is bookended by death on both sides.” The first point would be the year 1991. It would be the moment I stood over the open casket of my cousin. Murdered in cold blood on the streets of Jarupa, California. He was twenty-four at the time. Two years younger than I am right now. The funeral was held in Salt Lake City, and he was laid down to rest in the same mala’e where our grandfather also rests. I was twelve at the time, and on the cusp between childhood and growing up too fast. His death set a tone that would follow me during the years that followed, years that would find me witness to more violence and turmoil amongst the Tongan people.

If time were a line, I would hold up the next point and tell you that the climax of this story occurs on September 29, 2005, as our family gathered again to mourn the loss of another son, age thirty-six, married with five beautiful children. Murdered in cold blood on the streets of Salt Lake City. He was the kind of man who stood head and shoulders above most other men, physically and spiritually. Our family gathered once again to the same funeral home on Redwood Road to bury another fallen son. The day of the burial is bright and cool, peaceful and I am grateful for this peace, for it gives us something to steady our spirits on. Inside the funeral home, the air gets caught in between the many family and friends that have packed together to pay their last respects. The sisters weep a dissonant harmony, an Ancient song of mourning, a song whose only counterpoint is silence, for there are no answers to the questions that surround a thing like
murder. It is the aching song of a life lost before its time. To sing this song once in a lifetime is harsh, but to sing it twice is gutting, unforgivable, unexplainable.

The brothers who have survived serve as pallbearers. Under the heaviest kind of load, they lift and bear him upon their tall shoulders. As lines of mourners follow, we walk to the open grave where three family elders, my father one of them, speak in an Ancient ceremonial language I can’t understand. It is the same language that has been spoken at all our family’s passings, as we send them off to Pulotu to meet those who have gone before. Although I do not understand, I can feel it. Although my hair or my clothes have not moved, I can feel a rush of wind surround me, and in a moment I know that the Ancestors have gathered to escort our brother and son home to Pulotu. My father begs the crowd’s forgiveness, explaining that this Ancient tongue of the speech cannot be translated into English. As I cry for my cousin, I’m twelve years old again, watching the destruction of people I love, and laboring under the burden of a mind that longs to explain what the heart can only feel.

These two points on my map of genealogy compelled me to speak on the lines that fall between, the lines are bending towards destruction during this precarious time in Tongan history—a time of transformation into a Diasporic Nation. My research question was thus born out of a logical extension of a very simple and personal question: *Why are we getting caught up? Caught up in violence, in death, in prisons, in addictive games, caught up in these points of extermination?* Mixed with the question, *How can we flip the script on this game and how can we play to win?* I’ve extended that question through some of its logical ends and it has turned into this thesis you now hold in your hands. To put it simply this subject is about my brothers, blood brothers as well as and brothers in
life, who quite simply, got caught up in the mad and free-flow logic of the streets and who have either died or went to prison. And my intentions behind it, you might ask? Well, as they say, *thugs need love too*. That’s the real reason behind this—for in this case, I *am* my brothers’ keeper. I need no other reason.

In screenwriting they have what’s called a “backstory”. As you’ll see in Chapter 3, the backstory I’ve chosen begins with the invocation of a “Thug Genealogy”. By rooting my story to a Thug Genealogy, I am flipping ofthe script that many readers may have in their minds about what it means to be a criminal in America. As you’ll see, through a Thug Genealogy, I problematize the complex phenomena of criminality in America, and in so doing create a provocative, yet sympathetic, hero.

In screenwriting they have what’s called “the set-up”. Chapter 4, “Narrative Survival: Our Redemption Songs,” sets up what might be called a crisis of survival that the Tongan Diaspora is experiencing as an immigrant group in America, where traditional rhythms undergo extreme stress and improvisation at the interface of new, American rhythms. In Chapter 5, “Criminal Aliens”, I continue this American strand and set up Salt Lake City as the home of our deported hero. It is a setting that is perhaps more significant than Tonga, as the majority of deportees I interviewed during my field research were raised in Utah and deported from Utah prisons. Tonga remains to a certain degree unintelligible, due much to the fact that as a writer, I know and feel Utah, the place of my birth and much of my raising, but cannot say the same for Tonga, a homeland in which I am somewhere “in between”. Many of the deportees are feeling the same, in between, just posting. We are ambivalent about space and place. And finally, by the end of Chapter 5, our hero has reached his point of no return: he has been
channeled through the Americann machines of capture and is deported by the United States government. There’s no looking back at this point.

Our quasi-screenplay reaches a resolution in Chapter Six, with a thoughtful free flow collection of oratory segments, called “Poems in Exile”, gathered from my research with American deportees in Tonga in 2005. In this chapter, we see our hero begin to plant diasporic root cuttings into the soil of the homeland. This leads us to our conclusion, “Post Script”, where I close with a benediction inspired by the Navigator. But I don’t want to spoil the ending, so I’ll leave it at that for now.

I think when the story of our generation—that of first and second generation Tongans in the Diaspora—is told at our gathering in Pulotu, the unseen island to the west where the dead gather, the story of the American deportees will loom large in our imaginations as being representative of the real points of peril that have accompanied our dispersion from our island home. But, for this moment, right now, if we listen closely to the breath of this story, we will hear in it a battle cry that has clearly marked where we as Tongans stand in the rhythm wars that are taking place in America at the cusp of this new millennium...and we will realize that it is our principle of ‘ofa lahi (greatest love) and unity that will ensure our survival as a Diasporic Nation.

With all that being said, please note that the experience of the American deportees in Tonga is not the heart of this thesis. Far from it—the deportees are the story’s soul. The heart of this thesis is in the open palm that extends its offer to you, the reader, with these words: *Pando palma revelata prae cordia verus sedes mentis*—The open palm reveals the heart is the true seat of the mind. As in all things, may your heart guide your journey. ∞
A friend once told me that genealogy is a bedtime story. I like this idea: families retelling the same stories generation after generation, each one adding their own variation onto the chain. In cinematic terms, genealogy is our “Backstory”—all that has happened before we are enter the stage of our life. Genealogies are living, breathing, open-ended things, and they are always narrative in form. Thus it can be said that genealogy is the original knowledge. Who we are and where we came from, our Root.
We are born into genealogy and we pass away into genealogy. It is a map for storytelling. And, contrary to “pedigree charts” of a tree-like model, (although these constructions are a part of it), the genealogy I’m privileging is anti-hierarchical, it is more of a rhizomatic model. In the genealogy I’m privileging, all lines disperse and converge from the same point, from one root. In this genealogic, all points connect.

In lived practice, genealogy is a bedtime story, words we tell our children and behavior we demonstrate and transmit, oftentimes subconsciously without being aware of it. From this bedtime story, our children learn the patterns and feel the rhythms of the roots from which they have sprung.

If you asked to hear an rousing bedtime story, a tale of concealment and violence, pain and pleasure, of honor and justice, then tonight would be the night with hushed intonation that I would tell you this story of Thug Genealogy. By listening without concealment, you would be invited to enter a space where morality becomes inverted by divine decree, a space where the boundary between violence and righteousness travels precariously within the gnarled blind logic of justice. Like a thief in the night, this story would steal your sight and scramble your senses, stealthily crossing the many lines between truth and myth. By the end of the story, you would have become acquainted with images and specters that your dreaming had never awakened, and by the end of the story you would begin to feel something...

I begin by taking you back to the deep oral traditions of the Israelites in the Old Testament. Simeon and Levi are brothers, and they are the protectors of their family’s tribe. Their only sister, Dinah, is raped by a member of another tribe, by an outsider. Retribution of like (if not equal) kind is required, a pound for a pound…but things go
awry. Rather than killing the one offender, Simeon and Levi fall upon the rapist’s tribe and murder the entire male population. *The Bible* does not give us a glimpse into Simeon and Levi’s reasoning for taking so many lives to avenge their sister’s single violation, leaving us with more questions than certainties. All we know from the text is that upon his deathbed their father, Jacob, leaves them and their descendents with this blessing cut through with a curse:

Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man and in their self will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel (Genesis 49:5-7).

As “instruments of cruelty”, Simeon and Levi’s story speaks to the relationship between violence, moral justice and social order. More importantly, their story speaks to the link violence and concealment, for the reasons why they set their swords in such a violent extreme is kept a *secret*, and because thereafter they were scattered and divided in Israel their true identity remains in *concealment*.

Concealment was a main characteristic of an ancient order of assassins that existed widely throughout India from the 13th to the 19th century, an order that called themselves “Thuggee”. The English word “thug” has its etymological roots to this secret society and to the Sanskrit word “sthag”, meaning “to cover, to recover, to hide, to veil, to make invisible, to make disappear”. Thuggee’s origins seem to be very ancient,
although there is some debate surrounding this fact. Some posit that Thugs can be traced
to the time of Herodotus. Martine van Woerkens emphasizes in his book *The Strangled Traveler: Colonial Imaginings and the Thugs of India* that they were widely dispersed and entrenched across the complex terrain and ethnoscape of India up until the 19th century, when they were brutally suppressed by the British colonial government (2002: 116). Today, only the colonizer’s accounts are available for analysis.

Thuggee was a well-organized confederation of assassins divided into clans, and membership was hereditary, being passed down family lines, from parents to children. Thuggee had codes of behavior which only initiates would know. These codes included verbal passwords and shibboleths as well as “telegraphic signs”, or a body language. Membership included rigorous initiation tests and rituals. Thugs robbed in gangs and strangled their victims, usually those of wealthier pilgrims who traveled dark and lonely roads at night. Thugs would come up on the travelers and methodically and ritually, they would strangle their victims with a leather cord. Upon death, any booty their victim had would be plundered, and a tithe of it dedicated to the goddess, Kali. Religion seems to be the justification and motivation for their violence, which perhaps explains Thuggee’s longevity and wide dispersal. Thugs worshiped the goddess of destruction, Kali. They saw their crimes and transgressions as sacred and saw themselves to be conducting the sacred work of the deities. Thugs saw themselves as agents of the deity, bound by sacred covenant to enact a sacred violence. One of their origin myths points to a primordial imbalance in the universal scale between good and evil, a glitch in the plan of the Gods. The imbalance needed to be checked every now and again, and the Gods had chosen
Thuggee as their henchmen, on a sacred mission to restore order and balance through assassination.

Thugs were seen as embodiments of disorder, their religious impulses as primitive idol worshipping, and their practices as savage acts of human sacrifice. In short, they were imagined to be a serious threat to colonial order and the project of Western civilization. Beginning in 1830, after hundreds of years of being an active force, British colonialists began an aggressive extermination campaign against Thuggee. It seems that the aggressive Thuggee suppression was part of a larger process of British imposition of political, economic and social norms and the Thugs were seen as too powerful of a competitive force in Indian society and thus needed to be exterminated. Accordingly, a campaign was enacted to locate, apprehend and punish by extermination or incarceration all Thugs in order to create a docile social body, more conducive to colonization. Laws were codified to eradicate Thugs and special courts were set up to execute these laws. Verily, by the power of a new legal and normative colonial grid, within a few short years, the secret society of Thuggee was broken and extinct, cut into by colonial surveillance and discipline A British officer interrogating a Thug asked if he thought the English would ever succeed in suppressing Thuggee. The Thug, by the name of Sahib, answered, “How can the hand of man do away with the works of God?” (Hutton:10). Sahib would not have been surprised then, to see the re-emergence of the Thug on American soil.

It can be said that the first true modern American Thugs migrated in chains on slave ships, leading the slave rebellions (Kinikini:2003). Those men and women who decided to buck the systems that bound them, like the remarkable Nat Turner, and many many others, sung and unsung freedom fighters. Through slavery and subsequent forms
of neo-slavery, the Black Body was color coded to be a Thug Body in perpetuity upon arrival to the New World. Any action from a Black Body that was not docile and submissive was coded as deviant. Black bodies were the ultimate human experiment (in terms of sheer numbers) in the politics of subordinating bodies. It is here that the Thug Body is a form of history, a carrier of the experience of being enslaved in a “free society”.

To white America, Thug bodies are black bodies. It is here that white America places their fable of legitimation for the exploitation and violence against an entire “race”. This is the fable of the savage Other, the Black body, hypersexual, violent and aggressive. On the dialectic opposite side from the Thug is the house nigger, the infantilized, smiling “Samba”, hat in hands, the domesticated, castrated fable, impotent and non-threatening to white patriarchy. However, just outside the house, there were the perimeters and slave quarters that couldn’t always be policed. In these shadows, rebellions and escapes were planned and executed. In these peripheral spaces, the Thug learned to artfully scramble and break codes, learned to cover, conceal, and render himself invisible from the gaze of the capturers. The heathen savage emanating primitive rhythms and the infantilized man-child, incapable of independence—two myths that justified the civilizing and domesticating systems of discipline: first the economic institution of slavery, then forms of neo-slavery: factories, schools, and prisons, etc.

Indeed, much of African American cultural tradition is tied to expressing and surviving the paradox of being a violently enslaved people in the land of the free. In reaction to intense surveillance and under the bodily violence of slavery, Africans in America developed what Clyde Woods has called a “blues epistemology” in his book
Development Arrested: The Blues and Plantation Power in the Mississippi Delta. Blues epistemology figures how Africans enslaved on plantation blocks in the American South coded their own bodies within rhythms rooted to Africa in order to scramble the gaze of plantation surveillance. Claiming power within a structure that monopolizes power, the Thug enters a consciousness of the power of invisibility, or concealment, and thus averts the panoptic gaze of surveillance and scrambles the codes that are designed to govern, and in the Thug’s case, literally capture, the body. Like two beasts of similar natures, concealment and surveillance stand back to back in power-knowledge circuits. If power and knowledge are moderated by surveillance—then to visibility is essential to controlling the power balance. Like the crew from The Wizard of Oz discovers, power can be found behind the smoke and mirrors. But first, one must gain a Thug consciousness, and don the cloak of concealment and refuse to be visually subjugated by daring to cross behind the panoptic gaze of surveillance.

The Thug Body is about the movement of an invisible body within confined spaces. The Thug, like Maui and other cultural archetypes, is a trickster, working between the play of light, half light, and dark. He is an inhabitant of shadows and a ghost in space and time. The Thug Body is about movement in an invisible body, a body which cracks the false illusion that stares back from the panoptic mirror\(^\text{11}\). The Thug Body is about the power of the spiritual self to overcome physical limitations. As the main character in Ralph Ellison’s novel Invisible Man discovers, one’s true self lies in

\(^{11}\) Here I refer to the Panopticon as discussed by Michel Foucault when dealing with the prison as designed by architect Jeremy Bentham. Panopticon is a structure where one can see without being seen.
discovering one’s invisibility, one’s power of the spirit. True self-knowledge lies in
discovering the part of you that no one else can see, it is about claiming your invisibility:

I was looking for myself and asking everyone except
myself questions which I, and only I, could answer. It took
me a long time and much painful boomeranging of my
expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears
to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself. But
first I had to discover that I am an *Invisible Man!* (Ellison)

The Invisible Man has stumbled upon the truth that that his true self is not controlled
from the panoptic mirror and thus at this point of realization, he can finally play with his
visibility like a true Thug and use the Thug formula to usurp monopolized power. The
Invisible Man goes on to do artfully leave Thug traces throughout the pages of Ellison’s
fine novel.

*Thug Prophet Tupac Amaru Shakur*

Through a Thug consciousness the African slave developed ways to claim and
preserve agency in the face of brutal physical and spiritual oppression. The black
aesthetic tradition—including the musical genres of gospel, blues, jazz, bebop, hip-hop,
etc. etc.—can be traced to this collective rhythm which established a counter-
intelligibility that couldn’t be coded by the dominant powers, and thus was a line of
flight. They were rhythms that the African Diaspora remembered in narrative form from
the motherland, Africa.

Slain rap artist Tupac Amaru Shakur, embodied the Black aesthetic tradition that
drew from a Thug consciousness and combined it with a Black radical political voice that
spoke to the socio-political issues of race, class and poverty in America. In so doing, Tupac vocalized in a way no other rapper has the failed humanity of the economic conditions in 20th century American ghettos and prisons, confined and rigid spaces filled with Blacks. Tupac himself saw his art as a natural extension of the Black radical tradition of the 1960s, having been raised by a Black Panther mother. In fact, Tupac’s mother was incarcerated during much of her pregnancy with Tupac, and so Tupac from a very young age was familiar with the confinement of prison.

Narrating the stories he saw in his community at the close of the millennium, Tupac saw his music as a “battle cry to America,” saying, “That’s what I’m gonna do as an artist, as a rapper, I’m gonna show the most graphic details of what I see in my community and hopefully they’ll stop it, quit.”12 His social and political commentaries that run throughout his music hail Tupac into the position of prophet: speaking to the social body and imploring it to move into a better consciousness. His clear intention was for his music to narrate

...deep stories, like raw human needs. I just start to speak about things that affect me and things that affect our community. Sometimes I’m the watcher and sometimes the participant.13

Tupac’s body of art can be seen as protests songs, singing the plight of the working poor struggling to maintain their humanity in the face of poverty. His art has acted and continues to act as a brutal indictment of a number of political and economic

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orders that create great wealth for the few and greater poverty for the many. In narrating what he saw and felt, he diagnosed a condition of American life, a condition that lies at the heart of capitalist modes of production, a condition he calls “Thug Life”. Thug Life has emerged at the center of the peripheral culture of resistance in America in the last decades of the 20th century. Thug Life focuses on the political, social and economic exclusion of Blacks in a racist system, and also speaks to the poverty created by the rigid class system in America. In Tupac’s rendering, Thugs grow out of the lowest classes and Thug Life is symptomatic of a desperate poverty. In essence, he holds that criminals are a product of poverty, and this is no new idea. Consider Tupac’s following narrative, much more effective if seen through the original interview footage, but transcribed here:

Yes my raps are filled with rage. You have to be logical. If I know in this hotel room they have food everyday and I’m knocking on the door every day to eat, and they open the door, let me see the party, let me see them throwing salami all over, I mean just throwing food around, but they’re telling me there’s no food. Every day, I’m standing outside trying to... sing... my way in: we are hungry please let us in, we are hungry please let us in. After about a week, that song is gonna change to: we hungry we need some food After two three weeks, its like, give me the food or I’m breaking down the door... after a year, you’re just like I’m picking the lock coming through the door blasting, its like you hungry you reached your level. We asked ten years ago. We was asking with the Panthers. We was asking with them, the Civil Rights Movement. We was asking. Now those
people who was *asking* are all dead or in jail. So now what do you think we’re gonna do? *Ask*?¹⁴

R.I.P., charcoal drawing by Josephine A. Latu (used with permission of the artist)
At the heart of Thug Life, as Tupac envisions it, is a way of being for “the underdog” to attain dignity in the face of oppressive inhumanity:

When I’m saying thug, I mean, not criminal, someone to beat you over the head, I mean the underdog. The person that had nothing and succeeds is a thug cuz he overcame all obstacles. It has nothing to do with the dictionary’s version of thug. To me thug is my pride, not being someone that goes against the law, not being someone that takes, but being someone that has nothing, and even though I have nothing and no home to go to, my head is up high. My chest is out, I walk tall, I talk loud, I’m being strong.15

Much like taking back the racial epithet like “nigger” and flipping the script on a derogatory word by making it their own “nigga”, Tupac extracts “thug” from the colonial misconstructions and launches it into illuminating the “real situation”. Thug Life at its core is not about mindless violence. Thug Life is about reordering the social order taking the power of surveillance back through creating counter-surveillance, counter-orders, and concealments of their own. By scrambling the and inverting the social order, Thug Life questions the reigning order’s legitimacy and power, opening up the space for just change and movement. A Thug is willing to break the systems that bind, yes, by any means necessary, yes....and at the core of this creative violence is a desire for freedom from the social designs arranged to capture their bodies. This desire for freedom is what sets Thugs apart. In understanding the creative force of violence as did Simeon and Levi,

Thugs are willing to don the blindfold as the executioner of just rewards, by any means necessary. By emphasizing that the heart of Thug Life is not criminality and violence, but rather at the heart of Thug Life is justice and morality, Tupac hails the Thug as a soulful being with a heart and a human longing to attain, as W.E.B. Du Bois has said, a “self-conscious manhood”.

The Thug searches for freedom from material trappings. Tupac draws an astute parallel between the Thug spirit of freedom (not blind nihilism) and the American spirit of freedom:

I don’t understand why America doesn’t understand Thug Life. America is Thug Life. What makes me saying “I don’t give a fuck” different than Patrick Henry saying “Give me liberty or give me death”? What makes my freedom less worth fighting for than Bosnians or whoever they wanna fight for this year?

The search for freedom lies at the philosophical core of Thug Life, and this is why Thug Life is soulfully relevant to the uniquely American rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—seemingly illusory rights that have remained as elusive as the Thug himself. In Tupac’s treatment, Thug Life is a protest of the economic coding of the Black Body into economic futility (and hence into criminality) as well as about the continued enslavement of the Black Body in prisons. Thugs, more than anything else, seek justice—justice of the body, justice of a material kind. They seek to break boundaries and confinements of the material. Where there are material imbalances, creating pain and poverty, there is the Thug, waiting to take by any means necessary and redistribute,
wanting to reorder the upset balance into a higher synthesis. Not intoxicated by the power or pleasure in violence, and in a way immune to it, Thugs in Tupac’s realm embrace an almost sacred ethic of survival and dignity: “I don’t give a fuck” about life if it means living without liberty. “I don’t give a fuck” about the legitimate order because the legitimate order sucks my humanity dry—give me liberty or give me death—this is Thug Life. Freedom from confinement is at the core of Thug Life. I leave you with words attributed to Martin Heidegger, who said, “The essence of truth is freedom. Freedom lets beings be the beings they are.” Thugs are the enforcers of freedom. By any means necessary. They are indispensable archetypes within the human map of genealogy, which is why they may face a million different extermination orders or exiles, but will always reemerge through a certain line of flight, resurrected in new form, ready to survive. ∞
few months before his untimely death, Bob Marley laid down a track that maps his prescriptions for humanity’s modern disruptions. This song was his last will and testament and the capstone of his prophetic work. It is said that tears streamed down his face in rivers as he strummed his guitar and that his voice stretched to metaphysical proportions (as it always did) to inhabit all the tones:

*Old Pirates, yes they rob I
Sold I to the merchant ships
Minutes after they took I
From the bottomless pit.*
But my hand was made strong
By the hand of the Almighty
We forward in this generation
Triumphantly
Won't you help to sing,
These songs of freedom?
All I ever had,
Redemption Songs, Redemption Songs.
Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery;
None but ourselves can free our mind.
Have no fear for atomic energy
'Cause none of them can stop the time.
How long shall they kill our Prophets
While we stand aside and look?
Some say it's just a part of it,
We've got to fulfill the Book,
Won't you help to sing,
These songs of freedom?
'Cause all I ever had,
Redemption Songs, Redemption Songs.\(^{16}\)

Marley lyrically traces how all kinds of bondage, whether material, mental or spiritual, are emancipated by the power of narrative, of “redemption songs”, that heal and restore humanity’s center through narrative, through the acts of bearing testimony and bearing witness. He invites—indeed compels and pleads—us to help him sing “these songs of freedom”. According to him, redemption songs allow freedom from all sorts of bondage of a “technological inhumanity”. Redemption songs are the ways we express our knowledge: our songs, stories, dances, art, culture, et cetera. They are our “narratives”, embedded in our maps of genealogy.

Narratives are survival strategies, migration plans that map (plan as a noun, map as a verb) where we’ve been and where we’re going. Narratives are the tools of imagination, and imagination, as Lyotard says, “allows one either to make a new move or change the rules of the game” (1984:52). Narratives are imagined things that can be

\(^{16}\) From the album *Uprising* (Island: 1980).
catalysts for political enactment of group identity, inspiring solidarity and movement. Collective imagination is a powerful unifying force. It is real. Such unity can and does change the face of the known world.

The Old Testament tells the story of the capture of Israelite families by Babylonians in 586 B.C. Through this narrative line we can trace the word “diaspora”, meaning a dispersion of a people that was formerly concentrated in one place. Thus begins the perpetual narrative of the Israelite exile from Zion and their maintenance as a Diasporic Nation. As these captives reached their Babylonic place of exile, they paused before a crystalline moment dividing all that was with all that would be. In this suspended moment, they sang one of the most wistful songs ever laid down on Earth’s track:

_By the rivers of Babylon,_
_There we sat down, yea, we wept_  
_When we remembered Zion._

_We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof._
_For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song;_  
_And they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying._
_Sing us one of the songs of Zion._
_How shall we sing the Lord’s song_  
_In a strange land?_  
_-Psalms 137

In the midst of captivity and exile these diasporic Israelites hung their harps upon the willows, sat down on the banks of the river and simply wept. What were their feelings that made them hang up their harps—their rhythmic carriers of soul—upon the weeping willows? At this moment, I think they must have experienced two things. The first must have been the hollowing grief of remembrance, for the memory of Zion was still so fresh in their minds: We wept when we remembered Zion”. The second thing they must have felt was the profound crisis that comes with the literal embodied displacement from the
physical homeland: How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land? It was a crisis felt as they perceived their imagined center (the physical Zion) was no more a part of their physical reality. It’s the same crisis every human experiences as they exit the womb and enter an unknown environment. The question of survival of their rhythmic carriers of soul, their harps and their songs of Zion dominates this song.

This Psalm provides a narrative map to diasporic survival. The first key in this map points to the necessity of remembering the homeland, for to forget is to lose our center and thus enter anarchy, which would be equivalent to death for our collective rhythmic carriers of soul. We maintain centeredness in the narratives we chose to live and to tell. Narratives reproduce a community’s center, and a center ensures survival—this is the meaning of re-membrance. Remembrance is a key of diasporic survival.

Which is why the narrative map of Psalm 137 continues with a heavy-handed admonition to re-member the center at all costs:

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.

With the first key established, that we must remember our center place, the heart of the Psalm remains concealed and the question of survival still hangs in the balance: How can we sing our songs in a strange land? In the 1970s, reggae musical group The Melodians answered with an expanded translation of Psalm 137 in their song Rivers of Babylon:

By the rivers of Babylon
There we sat down
Yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion
For the wicked carried us away in captivity
Required from us a song
How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?
Sing it out loud
Sing a song of freedom sister
Sing a song of freedom brother
We gotta sing and shout it
We gotta talk and shout it
Shout the song of freedom now
So let the words of our mouth
And the meditation of our heart
Be acceptable in Thy sight
Over 1
So let the words of our mouth
And the meditation of our heart
Be acceptable in Thy sight
Over 1
Sing it again
We’ve got to sing it together
Everyone of us together
By the rivers of Babylon

The Melodians’ prescription is to, upon heartfelt meditation, simply: *Sing it out loud, sing a song of freedom... shout the song of freedom... We’ve got to sing it together, everyone of us together*. Herein lies the final key to diasporic survival mapped out in Psalm 137: simply sing our songs, everyone of us together. To sing our songs is to give them, and us, survival. These are our songs of freedom, our Redemption Songs.

As the direct descendants of the most skilled Navigators the world has ever known, Tongans have been blessed with a knowledge of the va—of space, of “in between”. Tongan Anthropologists ‘Okusitino Mahina and Tevita Ka’ili have called the Peoples of the Sea the Moana People. Tevita writes, “Today it is common knowledge that the Moana people achieved one of the greatest spatial movements in the history of the world” (2005:86). In this fact of our history lies a narrative seed that we can choose to

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consider: that the Moana people have always been in a liminal state of diaspora, posted in the paradoxical bind of movement and stasis, a moving line of being in between two static points, navigating space in between two island points. Thus, as the descendants of the People of the Sea, we have within our collective consciousness the tools of Navigators—the tools of diasporic living and survival.

You might even say that islands have a unique oceanic rhythm that imbues its inhabitants with what might be called a “diasporic consciousness”—that the deep blue creates a special and rarefied way of being and knowing, traced to the special physical and spiritual qualities of vai (water). Vai is a conduit for spirit, for Mana. We can only imagine that the technologies which enabled the Ancestors to navigate and disperse across the deep blue were narrative in form—maps of the known world in the form of myths, origin stories, prayers, chants, songs, melodies, music, dance, art, building codes, ritual celebrations of life and death—all things “cultural” through which rhythm can be felt, known and enacted. These narratives are in a way mnemonic devices which allow us to remember who we are and where we come from and, as Filipe Tohi says, contain principles of knowledge. The maps of the universe unfolded in a very different manner for the Ancestors, precisely because of their narrative forms. We are connected to these forms narratively, in how we eat, breath, live, love, laugh, and die. If we watch closely enough, each singular expression can feel these collective connections and enact a collective movement of imagination. Our narratives—from Lalava to the innumerable others—are our survival maps, ways we can remain connected to each other and to those who have gone before, our Ancestors.
The Tongan “Diaspora” has Ancient roots of wandering, exploration, and oceanic flux. Today they continue that mobility and expansion of Oceania into new spaces during today’s era of “globalization”. Since the 1970s many new Tongan communities have settled throughout the Western United States—in essence extending the social body across modern national boundaries creating a Diaspora Nation—a Nation united by human consciousness not only by paper charters and “constitutions”, which in the end, are just paper.

Some say that Pacific migration can be framed in a narrative of globalization, of money, of economics, of remittance checks—monies made overseas sent home\textsuperscript{18}. If you asked a Tongan man or woman why they came to America—a real person, a real migrant—the narrative that you would hear would most likely sound different. It would likely be a story and it would be about family, love and ultimately survival. You would be told that we came to America to be rejoined with our families, and that it is ‘ofa lahi (love), and not money, that determines our being. We needed to witnesses each other’s stories, so that we can know what to say when our children ask which lines do we take up and carry, and which do we put down? We would tell you that the story of our migration was motivated by a deep desire to be with each other, to celebrate our rituals of life and death together, to welcome each birth, to shepherd each other from dangers and to bear each other’s burdens along the way. And finally, you would be told that, as each member departed for the shores of a distant land, our greatest fear was that we would not be present to mourn and comfort each other when the hands of death called one of us home.

\textsuperscript{18} Remittances are the number one source of national income in the Tongan economy. Indeed, Tongan migration can be framed in terms of remittances.
The essential idea of Diaspora is that the homeland is somewhere else, and that we are in a way in exile, forced to live away from our heart’s true longing: home. Whether you were living in America, Aotearoa, Australia or Europe, you would remain Tongan as well by claiming your connection to the home-is-land of your parents and grandparents. As Tongans, we feel our lines of genealogy written across water, connecting us to our home-is-land. As migration to new settings continued, the homeland would forever remain fixed for the Diaspora, a beautiful, powerful, imagined thing—somehow removed from the urbanscapes of the industrialized nations. The survival map of the Rivers of Babylon tell us that our imagined center will not be lost if we continue to maintain our access portals to what the Israelites knew as “the Lord” (the sacred or poetic realm)—what we can call our unique rhythmic carriers of soul—or our culture—narrative practices that have been preserved to teach us Ancestral principles of knowledge.

So our immediate concern when learning to improvise in a “strange land” is dealing with the displacements of rhythms: how rhythms play out across the spatial-temporal fabric. Each instance of migration of Tongans across space carried oceanic rhythms from the Islands of the Sea. Displaced from the root landscapes and seascapes, we struggled in different ways to reconcile the rhythms of the new land with what we felt as “our songs”, or cultural practices, our rhythmic carriers of soul. The Tongan journey to America has had intense repercussions in the form of social displacement—a perceived loss of center.

The polyrhythmic game of displacement is multi-dimensional, but understandably fractal. As the Tongan Diaspora pulsed and beat across a strange new land, from islands
in the sea to islands in the desert\textsuperscript{19}, our rhythms became the sites of contestation. At the interface between new rhythms and powers, we began to experience an intense period of improvisation and reversioning of our ways. Consider the following bits and sequences:

An article in a Utah newspaper in the 1970s chronicled how a Tongan man responded to an advertisement for a horse for sale. When the owner of the horse asks the Tongan man what he's buying the horse for, the man replies, "It's for my daughter's first birthday." The horse owner, warmed by the answer, watches the Tongan man lead the horse to a truck. His warmth turns to horror as he watches the Tongan man take a gun and shoot the horse between the eyes: the horse was food for his daughter's birthday party.

My Uncle gives a bid to take out the tall mass of weeds spread out across this Man's massive backyard. My Uncle surveys the yard with a deft eye and says, "One-hundred fifty dollars". The Man looks across the tangled forest of weeds, considers the amount, and agrees at the fair price. He walks inside the house and sits himself down on his lazyboy in front of the TV. My Uncle sets his hands to the land, in masterful control of the ebb and flow of mana, and less than an hour later, he knocks on the back door saying, "I'm finished." Astonished, the Man looks up from his TV and out at the neat pile of weeds sitting on the freshly tilled ground. Jaw-dropped, he protests, "But...but that only took...an hour!" My Uncle stands unmoved, not quite understanding why the man seems surprised. They both stand in a suspended moment of rupture as the astonished Man hands over the hundred and fifty dollars.

\textsuperscript{19} When I say deserts, I am referring to the Tongan communities in Utah, a state in the Western US known for its hot, dry summers. I wrote a paper in my undergraduate career called "Islands in the Desert", about the Tongan Diaspora in Salt Lake City. Utah is the Diasporic home I know best.
A friend recounts how amongst the urban decay of San Francisco in the 1970s, a family of Tongan men, newcomers fresh from the islands, stand up in the cramped yard of an apartment block and dance the kailao, an Ancient song and dance passed down for generations, a rhythm San Francisco has never heard before. Unintelligible rhythms in a strange land.

Undoubtedly, Tongans caused a new rhythmic disturbance as they spread out across the various topography of the strange land. This rhythmic disturbance occurred at a level of sensation that goes beyond explanation\textsuperscript{20}. In his book *The Repeating Island*, author Antonio Benitez-Rojo suggests that there exists a “rhythm-langue that underlies everything, that precedes everything, that places itself in the very root of all processes and things” (1992:170). The experience of surviving as a diasporic people is about carrying on rhythms that are cut through with other rhythms, which are cut by still other rhythms, in a game of displacement which, as Benitez-Rojo suggests, “takes us to the point at which the central rhythm is displaced by other rhythms in such a way as to make it fix a center no longer, then to transcend into a state of flux” (1992:18). This displacing of rhythm upon rhythm is an improvisation, a flux, a danceable infinite exchange between American and Tongan ways. When touching down in America, far from melting into a mythological American identity, Tongans, like any new immigrant families, maintained their cultural ways, through a process of improvisation.

Improvisation led to questioning the carriers of rhythm, led to questioning cultural practices. Some ways were maintained, others were altered. In other words, improvisation led to a game of displacing and reversioning rhythms, it led to the creation

\textsuperscript{20} Gilles Deleuze talks about a “logic of sensation” and rhythm in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. 
of improvised songs which carried the root beat. Watching the rhythm wars in the Tongan Diaspora, we can see that the game of improvisation can be taxing, dangerous and even deadly.

**The Myth of the Crab in the Bucket**

Many of us may be familiar with the story of the “crabs in the bucket”, where immigrant groups who act United are compared to a bunch of crabs clawing their way out of a bucket. The moment one singular crab manages to reach the top lip of the bucket, the crab beneath him, in his own attempt to get out, pulls him down. Thus in a state of wretched disarticulation, the crabs mechanically move in a perpetual dance of failure, weakened by the very tools which God gave them for survival. The problem with this myth is that it’s not true. Really. Its just one of those myths that are meant to legitimate the myth that immigrant groups that have an inherent rhythm of Unity (i.e. an ability to take care of each other) will be stuck in the nether-dredges of the working class. It’s a myth that legitimizes the immigrant presence in the lowest paid jobs in the market, and a myth that delegitimizes any Unity-promoting behavior amongst new immigrants.

When I think of the myth of the Crab in the bucket, I can’t help but think of the line of poetry from T.S. Eliot: “I should have been a pair of ragged claws/scuttling across the floors of silent seas” in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*, where a human being reduces himself to a pair of ragged claws—*no mouth, no eyes, no heart*. Are we to believe the myth of the crab in the bucket? Are we a disarticulated people having only one set of tools which will ultimately bring us to self and mutual destruction? Caught in the bucket of socio-economic stagnation? Is our impulse of Unity really the culprit? Let us flip the script on this particular myth and look at it from a narrative perspective. The
myth is denotative: *these crabs pull each other down, therefore these crabs will never get out of the bucket.* However, if we take the myth from out of this cropping and expand it into a narrative arc, we could just as easily open up a story that illumines powerful questions: what are the forces that remove the crab from the floors of silent seas, into a bucket, food for slaughter in the ovens of a global meat market? What is the bucket *really?* Forget the myth of the crabs in the bucket. We have eyes, mouths, hearts, souls—and we feel what’s real.

There’s another problem with the myth of the crab in the bucket. Sadly enough, sometimes the myth is all too true, which is why it’s a really great myth and has persevered, creating powerful beliefs in the tellers and listeners. There are buckets that are designed to discipline, capture and even kill us. Sounds dramatic, but its true—societies play games, have rules, laws, orders, consequences. Misstep and the whole chain gets logged up. If you do the crime, you gotta do the time. The one bucket that I’ve seen too-often visited by Tongans is prison. I’ve got two brothers in prison at the moment. Witnessing what prison does to a person and to a family, I became very quickly committed to apprehending some sort of understanding that might assist Tongans towards better coping with the traps of the new land. Basically so that we can know and understand the reasons and rules of the game, so that we can play to survive, so that we can outlive extermination orders, and evade assassination, murder and disintegration, *so we can be free to be whole, and not butchered aspects of our whole self.*

In 1996, at the moment when a whole generation of diasporic offspring were reaching adulthood, US immigration law underwent profound changes. The effect this time was of tightening US borders with a specific intention to rid the country of “criminal
aliens” (undocumented immigrants convicted of felony offences) by specifically altering statutes regarding deportability. Under these massive changes, the US began to deport increasing numbers of “criminal aliens”. Since that time, an estimated two hundred Tongan “criminal deportees” have been removed from US prisons and deported to the Kingdom of Tonga.

Most of these deportees immigrated to the US as infants or small children and were raised in the Diaspora, and thus have limited experience of living in Tonga. For these deportees, returning to Tonga was in many ways an exile, a forced expulsion from what was considered their only “home”—the United States of America. If the golden remittance check is the flag of the diasporic experiment according to the narrative of globalization, then the deportees are the poster boys for the failed diasporic experiment in a number of narrative framings, both in Tonga and abroad. With criminal intent and seeming moral abandonment, this story frames deportees as thugs run amok, disparaging the Tongan name in a strange land. Crossing boundaries again and again, they are way out of line, playing a wicked game of unrighteousness. Not only unable to “survive” as seeds in the Promised Land, these sons have lost all connection to the root. Returned home in shackles, they are the failed lines along the American diasporic routes.

Is the Myth of the deportee true? I wanted to find out, so I went to Tonga in 2005 to do a little investigative research. Questions filled my mind. Would island living be the final stroke of rehabilitation for these convicted felons? Having fought bloody battles in the rhythm wars of America’s urban centers, would these Tongan sons remember the root when they returned to their place of origin? Or had years of warring on the streets of America, and consequent periods of incarceration in the Belly of the Beast, altered how
they identified themselves? How does diasporic improvisation respond when returned to the Root? Is it possible Tongan rhythms have become rootbound—mutated in their own right? And finally, is the saying “you can’t go home again” true? Or, as T.S. Eliot writes in *The Four Quartets*, is it the case that “we shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time”? Are journeys circular, spiraled, do we end where we begin and will we know the place when we return?

John Kolomatangi, a deportee and founder of the Iron Man Ministry in Tonga, a non-profit organization dedicated to serving the needs of deportees and other disadvantaged sectors of Tongan society, shares that despite the deep identity confusion inherent to diasporic life, Tongan rhythms provided for him lines of clarity that preempted cultural disintegration in the Strange Land:

My first tattoo, I tell this story often, my first tattoo is *TONGA* on my stomach. I didn’t really like tattoos, until I read an article in prison, that says tattoo is part of the Tongan culture…but we kind of let it go, for whatever reason…So now Tongans, mostly you see tattoos that somebody’s been in prison, or whatever…So for that reason, I wanted, talking about identity, I wanted to belong, I wanted to be Tongan. I got my first tattoo, and most of all the things we did growing up in the States, wrong or right,
we did it being proud of being Tongan, you guys know that. Most of us, “Tongan this, Tongan that”.

Like Malcolm X, John’s self-discovery occurred while captured in the refining fire of the prison machine. And so, a line of flight—prison tattoos—have brought a number of Tongans in prison transformation through a returning to an Ancestral way of being, back to the tatau that has been dormant in Tongan culture since missionization. Although these tattoos are often altered in geometric design into what can be called a Diapsoric tatau, they are still connected through the symbolic narrative practice of bloodletting and the symbolic inscription of narrative under skin. Especially in prison, a physical vise that is engineered to kill the human spirit, such narrative practices enact interior and exterior shifts in consciousness.

The nature of prison provides political lessons as well. Manu*, a deportee from Utah, spoke of one important lesson he learned in while incarcerated:

Prison taught me something—Unity. We’re inmates, you’re a police, and you’re about to take cigarettes away?
You’re about to make our life more miserable than it is?
Hell nah, we’re gonna get together, we’re gonna stand together and make this happen, to where we go against.
We’re gonna riot, we’re gonna do whatever it takes, to make it at least livable, to where we can cope with things.22

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21 Talanoa Session, 4/5/05.
* Name has been changed to conceal identity.
22 Talanoa Session, 4/4/05,
George Jackson, a Black Panther and activist, who wrote from prison a series of letters that was ultimately published as *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson*, speaks of the condition of possibility for the production of a revolutionary consciousness in prisons:

> Believe me, my friend, with the time and incentive that these brothers have to read, study and think, you will find no class or category more aware, more embittered, desperate, or dedicated to the ultimate remedy—revolution. (Jackson: 50)

And he further posts that it is tapping into poetic rhythms that will select the parameters of social shifts:

> If we accept this idea, that the revolutionary enterprise of a man or of a people originates in their poetic genius, or more precisely that this enterprise is the inevitable conclusion of poetic genius, we must reject nothing of what makes poetic exaltation possible. (ibid: 23)

Poetic genius already exists and needs only to be re-membered into the collectivity. The poetic genius of the Moana People already/always has within it the condition of possibility for healing the disruptions and negative effects of Diasporic life, i.e. life as a dislocated people. So its not so much a “revolution” as an “involution”—a revolution from *within*. Not a lashing outward, but a lashing inwards. And a lashing which is not a beating with a whip as slavemasters do, but the kind of lashing that True Navigators strapped with Master Building Codes do, in order to connect ‘afa (sennit cord) together
into lalava, the Ancient Tongan practice of lashing the structural beams of vakas and fales together using ‘afa and a beating (ta) to conform and conjoin with collective rhythms.

Accepting the condition of possibility for an Oceanic “poetic genius” is also accepting the possibility that enactments of such poetic genius will inevitably, upon reaching a degree of critical mass, create shifts in consciousness and real movements of the social body. Reaching a critical mass is already underway given the political and social climate of America for example, a climate which continues to disregard and disenfranchise its “tired...poor ...huddled masses yearning to breathe free”23. It is a critical mass that is transnational in scope since at the moment, for example, more Tongans live abroad in the Diaspora than at home. Which is why accepting the real power of a Tongan Diasporic Nation is crucial to understanding the potential shifts.

John and many other Diasporic offspring find strength in their Tongan root, and took on what might be called a “diasporic tatau,” in effect resurrecting the narrative practice of tatau back into Tongan consciousness. John’s idea sets an important backdrop—that our Tongan rhythms prevailed and preempted spiritual disintegration in the strange land. Indeed, it could be said that diasporic living has actually caused the re-emergence of Ancestral knowledge not manifest in the rootbound homeland. As diasporic offspring, we had no conscious memories of the being in Tonga, yet we inherited rhythms rooted to Tonga through our genealogy—through knowledge carried in our genes, and a new environment caused the manifestation of new variations and combinations. Tongan rhythms were the defining point of identity for them.

23 Closing lines of the poem inscribed at the foot of the Statue of Liberty on Ellis Island.
Being marginalized in a strange land it became crucial to maintain unity. It is a certain common genealogy that bonds all Tongans together. Toa*, a deportee from Salt Lake City, Utah, theorizes that collective memories shape us and have eclipsed any teleological impetus towards becoming “civilized” and adopting a “westernized mentality”:

Its not too many generations back that our mothers and our grandmothers were walking around with just something on the bottom, to cover their loins, and their breasts hanging out and everything like that. It wasn’t too far back, people were just killing each other, civil war in our country. It wasn’t that far, so it’s kind of hard to make people come from this kind of mentality to a [airquotes] “civilized, westernized mentality”.

He further posts that these collective memories are the root feeling that drives Tongans in the States towards a commonly felt center point of group identity, especially when Tongan rhythms are marginalized in a new country:

...Its in our blood to be United...“I’m a Tongan, I’m gonna feel you cuz you’re Tongan”. Especially being in another country and being considered a minority. Gives ourselves more of an excuse to be United, cuz we’re looked at as “Others”.24

* Name has been changed to protect identity.
24 Talanoa Session, Toa, 4/11/05.
The pressure to stick together caused Tongans in the states to emphasize the inherent impulse towards Unity. Here we see that dispersion actually creates a new version of unity.

Survival is never guaranteed, never has been, and never will be. If we are to survive, we must remember, imagine and will our survival maps into action. In my estimation, these maps already exist in the collective imagination. The project of our generation is to singularly apprehend these maps and re-imagine our collectivity. This project will continue with little reprieve and unfold a multitude more questions and experiences, in the way that revelation does, telling me that this is a story that is larger than me. While my choice of topic is organic and is motivated by a survival crisis that I feel is real in the Tongan Diaspora right now, as exemplified in the violent deaths and high incarceration of its youth, I am also careful not to fool myself into thinking that I—or anyone else, for that matter—can be a redeemer of such social and spiritual disruption.

“Crisis research”, says Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, a Maori scholar writing about indigenous research, is “directed at explaining the causes of [in her case] Maori failures and supposedly solving Maori problems” (1999:174). She warns us against the impulse of putting too much concentration on the redemption that narrative strategies can enact when trying to solve or counter social ills: “…taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people to improve [our] current conditions” (ibid: 3). Yet still, it does seem to me that groups of humans—whether we be called families, villages, tribes, cities, neighborhoods, gangs, nation-states, diasporas, bands, congregations, or whatever—have always conceived and executed travel plans (migration maps) that are political and revolutionary, in the interest
of survival and in the interest of perpetuating our genes into the next generation. Isn’t this the real role of imagination? To imagine how to simply Survive?

To be centered as a fragmented individual within a center of imagined unity is to Survive. You know who has your back if you know what a person fronts. What’s real on the front end? Ramona Fernandez poses in Imagining Literacies: “Narrative is its own healing act; narrative reinscribes us at the center of our community” (2001: 105). Decentered groups of people are people who have lost their sense of unity. And unity is necessary for survival since as humans, we’re social creatures. We need to gather around the fire and be together. Definitely it’s helpful (if not crucial) to share labor tasks and resources, to share stories of experience, information, and to gather together to share food and to heal each other’s ailments. And it’s definitely required that we join one another to make babies and to bury our dead. No one births themselves into the world alone, and we spend our whole lives hoping that we won’t die alone with no one to mourn our passing or celebrate our memory. As social groups, we need to call upon standards, ensigns of identification, tribal markings, we need to wear them on our body, tataus that speak our genealogies. We need to communicate with common tongues and recognize common signs and symbols that can identify one of us...one who will care. ∞
As Tongan rhythms interfaced American rhythms, as the movement of Oceanic bodies into a strange land began to create new improvisations, an alchemical stirring kicked up a gang of dust and brought forth the surfacing of contradictions that vividly revealed a dark disconnect in the American Dream, which, as rap artist Tupac Shakur sings, is more like an “American Nightmare”\textsuperscript{25}. In America, we’re all free agents. After all, America is home of the brave and the land of the Free. Is violence a choice? Is

\textsuperscript{25} In the song “Panther Power”.
criminality a choice? Of course it is. If you’re coded into poverty in America, its one of your main choices. You can either accept your coding in the grid or create a line of flight with moves of concealment. In the case of our deported hero, his backstory included growing up in America during the 1990s. So we can continue our story by saying, “Once upon a time in America…”

Once Upon a Time…

The 1990’s was the precarious decade that tottered before the ripening moment in world consciousness when the initiatory battle cry of the falling Twin Towers brought the United States of America into a new era. The State and its apparatuses of power had grown like a beast and continued to form its legal codes into controlling the “dangerous classes” (Parenti, 1999:135). April 29th, 1992, the not guilty verdict for the police who beat Rodney King blew the lid off a pressure cooker in Southern California that had been pent up for a long time. Once again the ghettos of Los Angeles took up arms and aimed to set the captives free. I was living in Riverside at the time, an hour from the rioting. We watched the skies turn from purple to black. After the days of rioting, the principal at our local high school responded by reading Shel Silverstein’s The Giving Tree over the PA system. In an atmosphere of fear, he turned to a simple children’s story to bring the student body into a calm understanding. The musical group Sublime narrated their own take with much-needed levity in their song April 29th, 1992:

April 29th, 1992
There was a riot on the streets
Tell me where were you?
You were sittin’ home watchin’ your TV
While I was participating in some anarchy
First spot we hit was my liquor store
I finally got all that alcohol I can’t afford
With red lights flashin’, time to retire
And then we turned that liquor store into a structure fire
Next stop we hit it was the music shop
It only took one brick to make the window drop
Finally we got our own P.A.
Where do you think I got this guitar that you’re hearing today?
When we returned to the pad to unload everything
It dawned on me that I need new home furnishings
So once again we filled the van until it was full
Since that day my living’ room’s been much more comfortable
Cause everybody in the hood has had it up to here
Its getting harder, and harder, and harder each and every year
Some kids went in a store with their mother
I saw when she came out she was getting’ some Pampers
They said it was for the Black Man
They said it was for the Mexican
But not for the White Man
But if you look at the streets, it wasn’t about Rodney King
Its this fucked-up situation and these fucked up police
Its about comin’ up and stayin’ on top
And screamin’ 1-8-7 on a mother fuckin’ cop
It aint in the paper, its on the wall
National guard
Smoke from all around
Cuz as long as I’m alive, I’ma live illegal
Let it burn
Wanna let it burn, wanna let it burn
Wanna wanna let it burn
(I feel insane)²⁶

The riots weren’t precisely about color coding, they were more about “comin’ up and stayin’ on top”, a situation systemically impossible for classes throughout the social strata—classes that bleed through color line. The riots rather, responded to a more general “fucked up situation”. They were in reaction to the US’s normative and legal grid that binds human beings into spatially-confined subjectivities, the spatial borders of which are patrolled and enforced by “these fucked up police”. The “fucked-up situation” produces a subjectivity that says, “As long as I’m alive, I’ma live illegal”, cuz “I feel

²⁶ From the self-titled album Sublime (1996, MCA).
insane”. As Sublime narrates, the 1990s picked up the counter-culture flag of the 1960s and sang, “burn baby burn, burn baby burn”.

Sublime was certainly right, April 29th, 1992 was a seminal moment for impoverished communities across the US, who were sick on a diet of poverty and who were being assaulted in the War on Drugs. With new crime bills, criminal subjectivities were being programmed at alarming rates. You wake up one morning and discover that you’re a criminal. Without laws there are no criminals. In the weeks following the riots, dad bought a brand new VCR for $30 out of the back of a van in the vacant lot down the street. Besides electronics and other consumer goods, an increase of weapons flooded the blackmarket. The goods, especially the guns, were circulated throughout informal networks connected by highways like the I-15, an interstate vein that connects California, Nevada, and Utah. Weapons from the blackmarket soon left L.A. and entered Salt Lake City and fueled the extralegal drug economies, which (because they fall outside legal frameworks) require an extralegal enforcement and protection mechanism.

*Once upon a Place*...

Thanks to Brigham Young’s colonialexpertise, Salt Lake City is an immaculately planned grid, a grid which emanates out from ground zero: the LDS temple. Salt Lake City is a classic “tracks” city as well—railroad tracks that run North-South divide the grid between east and west, rich and poor, saint and sinner. To the East lie the “have” neighborhoods, from the refurbished Victorian homes in the Avenues to the cozy bungalows with exquisite custom woodwork and leaded glass of the American Crafting period of the early twentieth century. To the west lie industrial blocks of land,

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27 Brigham Young is the religious leader who led the first mass migration of European Americans into what is now the state of Utah.
the “have not” neighborhoods consisting of more recent track housing of the 70s and 80s made of very cheap materials and wretched siding. Newer houses styled after the Home Show California variety can be found in the newer suburbs the farther South you go. Out West, beyond the industrial buffer you get the immigrant neighborhoods of the Westside, and beyond that you have the airport, and beyond that, the extensive and barren Salt Flats—dead land that is the color of death itself, white and washed out dirt, salted with only the distant memory of water. See, the Great Salt Lake is the remnant of an Ancient Sea, that has only left a concentrated puddle of salted water that the Mormon settlers called The Great Salt Lake. Beyond the Salt Flats lies the abandoned settlement of ‘Iosepa. ‘Iosepa, the Hawaiian word for Joseph, after Joseph Smith, was the first Polynesian colony in Utah established in 1889, abandoned after the Hawaiian Saints who settled it decided living in a segregated desert community wasn’t exactly the Zion they were in search of.

The 1965 Immigration Act opened up immigration by ending quotas based on national origin and instead made the main factor of selection the occupation of the applicant, giving preference to those who had relatives in the US. Race, religion, color and national origin was no longer factors in the selection process. Tongans began chain migrate, family by family, and settle into the Salt Lake Valley. They settled along the green banks of the Jordan River—the water way that runs through Salt Lake Valley, in the Westside neighborhoods of Rose Park, Glendale, West Valley, Granger, Kearns, Taylorsville, et cetera.

Since I don’t mean for this to be a survey of the Tongan Diaspora in Salt Lake City, I’m going to enter through one point in the map, one city, one portal. Let me enter
Salt Lake City in the 1990s by telling you about the Bench at my old reluctant stomping ground, Highland High School. Before 1988, Highland High almost exclusively drew its student body from the zip codes immediately surrounding: the garish Country Club blocks, zip code 84109. During the 1980’s, the majority of first and second generation Tongan youth went to either West High or South High, both schools drew their student bodies from the Westside, and both schools found themselves right around the railroad tracks bordering East and West. In 1988, South High was shut down, and eventually the building was refurbished and turned into Salt Lake Community College. All of the South High kids from the Westside neighborhoods were redistributed and bused into either East High or Highland High. Highland High, once a White paragon of Eastside wealth—was soon stained with non-white, mainly immigrant, kids.

In my day, around 1996, there were maybe thirty Polynesian kids at Highland, most of them Tongan. In the middle of the central foyer, there was a bench, the Poly Bench, right in the middle of the central foyer. The Tongan kids colonized that bench all seven periods of the day, and very few outsiders were allowed to occupy that space. It’s sort of a throwback to the Village Green that is found in Tongan villages. At the University of Hawai‘i while I’ve been here, the Samoan students have a similar occupation of social space between the two big trees on that center walkway stretch between Campus Center and Hamilton Library. Anyways, the Bench was homebase for all Tongan social action at Highland High and would only be left unattended when school

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28 Tongans are the largest Polynesian population in Utah. According to the US Census 2000, 51% of the 12,901 Polynesians were Tongan. In my experience, these numbers are low, since Tongans, like many new immigrant groups are highly likely not to fill out census forms or other government tracking devices. If you’re an illegal alien, or a criminal alien for that matter, the idea is generally to elude tracking and capture.
security would chase us towards classes. Your routine went like this: get to school at whatever time and go directly to the bench and check out who was there. You chop it up for a little while with whoever was there, and just stay posted until something better came up to do (which usually wasn’t class, there was no kind of relaxation in class, only discipline) and you kicked it there until the school cop came around and told us to go to class. Sometimes you’d go to class, and sometimes you’d take a walk or drive and visit other schools, or go to the mall, or the movies, or whatever. Whatever you did during the day, by 2:30, you’d come back to school to check in—not with school, but with the social situation.

The North Doors, Highland High School

After school, homebase would shift to the North Doors, where the requisite after-school loitering would occur, where we would wait for rides, or scrounge up money to
catch the bus. It was a typical afternoon at the North Doors when my cousin John caught a ride home with two other Poly girls. As they pulled out of the parking lot, a car of Mexicans rammed into them sideways, sending the car skidding towards the parking lot curb. A Mexican kid in brown Dickies, a wifebeater and a hairnet whom none of us recognized gets out of the car with a sawed off shotgun and points it towards John. Word had it John had beefed with this guy during 3rd period in the weight room, over what we didn’t know. But none of us expected that a shotgun would be needed to settle it. Apparently we were wrong. As everyone ducked around corners and took cover under bushes, John raced into the school followed by the gun-toting hooligan. Inside, a spray of pellets riddled the ceiling before the school cop managed to tackle the guy. John was suspended for a few days, but he walked away unharmed.

Highland High School itself has an interesting history. It is built directly on the site of the first prison in the territory of Utah initially erected in 1854. The Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah stated that,

The early erection of a substantial prison would not only tend to prevent crime, but also to reform the offenders and put them in the way of self-support. 29

Our school colors were black and white, inspired by the black and white striped garments prisoners used to wear. During my years at Highland, two students committed suicide on school grounds, and one student committed suicide by jumping off the freeway overpass that ran right outside school grounds. I always thought that it was really bad luck to build

29“Agency History for the Utah State Prison”
a school on an old prison. Then I read Michel Foucault and it seems to fit: schools and
prisons—_institutions of discipline:_

In the course of the 17th and 18th centuries, the
disciplines became general formulas of domination.
Society dispensed with the costly and violent
relation of slavery through such new forms of
discipline (i.e. the prison), but nonetheless achieved
effects of utility at least as great. (1978:137)

I remember everything about high school was about discipline along class lines.
Everywhere you looked you could find disciplined bodies, bodies performing their racial
and class coding in scripted yet seemingly unconscious ways. The cafeteria—strictly for
poor immigrants, Mexicans and Latinos especially, those on free or reduced school lunch,
those who didn’t have cars or cash to leave school grounds and run down to the corporate
franchises that sold fast and statused foods. Honors/college prep/Advanced Placement
classes were reserved for the college bound (read: Middle class, read: white) kids and the
occasional liminal being like me. This was a typical environment that Tongan youth
found themselves in—the American high school.

I was forever suspended in liminality and in a way hypersensitive to the hypocrisy
and cracks in the system. I had a talent for forging excuse notes and giving
administration the correctly worded run-around. Is it any wonder that the only time I have
ever been arrested and charged with any kind of criminal offense was for “falsifying
government documents”? I tried to get one of my best friends a fake ID at the
Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) in Rose Park using my social security card and
birth certificate. Long story short, the computers outsmarted us and we got busted. We were taken to a room at the back. The DMV staff called the cops, and we were arrested and questioned immediately, first about our ethnicity, and then about our affiliation with ethnic gangs, like the TCG. The arresting officer was familiar with some of my gangbanging cousins and asked me if I knew so-and-so Kinikini. I became irritated and quickly asked him what the TCG or any of my cousins had to do with his arresting us for a petty misdemeanor. My friend threw in some salt for good measure: “Do we look like gangbangers to you?” The arresting officer was not impressed and flexed back: “Falsifying government documents is not petty, it’s a class A.”

I’m positive, although I have no proof but the proof but my witness above that the Metro Gang Task Force had the Kinikini family—amongst many other Tongan families under surveillance. Surveillance of Tongan families was a routine strategy that the police of Salt Lake used as they tried to hone their craft of mapping Polynesian criminality and trapping Polynesian criminals. I know this because in high school, I was introduced into the Metro Gang Task Force through “community outreach”, which was, in my estimation, a program which aimed to educate and build understanding between state agencies and civilians on the surface for public and media relations (PR), as well as to validate their funding objectives, but which ultimately falls contaminated under the influence of the Task Force’s primary paramilitary goals of tracking gangs and capturing gangsters to feed a system hungry for subordinated bodies. As a youth outreach “volunteer”, they wanted me to talk at panels about what its like to be a college-bound Polynesian teenager and they wanted me to educate my peers about the dangers of gangs. It was a two-pronged mission that I balked at but I saw the advantages of playing the
game for a few months in order to gain access to their Annual Gang Conference in 1997, where I attended a presentation about Polynesian, and especially Tongan, gangs. The presentation detailed very clear ways to spot a Tongan gangster and very clear ways to capture one once spotted. The Conference was a revelation for me, for it was the first time I discovered just how deep in it these state agencies were, and yet how off-point they were as well. The Conference also pointed me in a direction of how to analyze and consider state and civilian relations in the Tongan Diaspora. Cuz the taste in my mouth was one like, what the hell do you know about Tongans or their reasons for forming gangs?

As Martin Scorsese's contemporary gangster film Goodfellas posts, the mob operated as a protection and enforcement mechanism for people who couldn't go to the police, as the main character Henry Hill narrates:

That's what the FBI can never understand—that what
Paulie [the mob boss] and the organization offer is protection for the kinds of guys who can't go to the cops.
They're like the police department for wiseguys.\(^{30}\)

This theory can be applied to extralegal violence and explain what's often called "gangsterism" amongst ethnically marginalized groups in America, including new immigrants, who often find that the piece of the pie that is most readily available lies outside the law. Police and state apparatuses of surveillance are the legitimated order legitimated through written legal codes. Yet there are counter-orders that operate in

\(^{30}\) Goodfellas, Directed by Martin Scorsese, (1990, Warner).
competition with legitimated orders. Extralegal orders are tied to narrative codes of their own, codes like the ones found in Thug Life\textsuperscript{31}.

Both Thugs and Gangstas are closely linked, particularly in the American traditions of criminality. In this orientation, it is helpful to create a distinction between Thugs and Gangstas. And here I mean Gangsters in the sense of black American gangs from urban epicenters like Chicago and Los Angeles which developed in the last thirty years of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, as continuing part of the great social upheaval and civil unrest of the 1960s. I make one overarching distinction that will suffice for this discussion. While Thugs can be understood in terms of \textit{invisibility}, Gangstas can be understood in terms of \textit{visibility}, in terms of claiming and glory. Gangstas play the duality caught between the veil of \textit{being seen} and \textit{seeing}. Gangbanging involves gaining notoriety and attention and makes a way of becoming visible within marginalized and economically invisible groups, which is why gang-like formations are common occurrences within many immigrant groups in America, be they the Catholic Irish, facing discrimination from the already-settled Anglo-Americans at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, to the Italians (who formed the most notorious and possibly the most formally organized “gang” in America—the Mafia, “\textit{la cosa nostra}”) to the Mexicans, Chinese and Japanese (who have perhaps the most tenuous and confused relationship within the immigrant story, being particularly affected by the way immigration policy waxes and wanes according to the economic and political climate\textsuperscript{32}) to Armenians, Cambodians, Laotians, Koreans,

\textsuperscript{31} Tongan gangsters tie in tight to the Black American codes through the rhythm of African beats for example: rap music, “songs of freedom” of Black America.

\textsuperscript{32} For example, the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, prohibited all Chinese from entering the US; in 1907, the US and Japan sealed a “Gentlemen’s Agreement” limiting the right of Japanese to settle in the states; by 1917, Congress had excluded virtually every
Samoans or Tongans, etc. etc.—waves of migrants who touched shore after the gates of America were re-opened in 1965. Although America is a nation of immigrants, the tension between “new” immigrants and previously settled groups materializes as a “center” and margin. And so, all sorts of new immigrants are apt to form minoritarian survival strategies such as gangs in order to gain social and economic visibility.

As one deportee in Tonga tells me, when he first became aware of gangbanging, “It just blew my mind, I wanted to knock people out too, wanna be able to hurt people and then have people talk about me.” When I asked him if gangbanging was a way of making a living, he said:

When I started, it was a way of getting fame, of getting recognition. As time went on, it became more of a way of being. That’s not just what I chose, it was my way of life.

I didn’t know nothing else. Westside Tongan Crip was my life, nothing more.

Sam*, a deportee from Salt Lake City, remembers growing up in the States, saying home was a place to stay away from, since home was strict, and not always understandable to youth growing up in America. There were often generation gaps

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33 The Immigration Act of 1965 got rid of the essentially racist national quota system, thus opening up migration to more nationalities. After this Act, Asian and especially Pacific migration increased exponentially.

* Name has been changed to protect individual’s identity.
between parents and children. Communicating became problematic. The discipline at home was like the discipline at school, something confining to stay away from:

I mean when we were growing up there, we didn’t really stay at home. We just show up at home sometimes. We would all stay at one place, and when we go home, we had to go home. But a lot of the time we would stay at like just a little hut.

Caught between a double bind of not feeling the Tongan codes implemented at home, and not feeling the American codes implemented at schools, the streets became spaces where improvisation between the two poles could be played out with freedom.

Siua* was particularly eloquent about why the streets in the States had so much draw for Tongan youngsters. For him, the streets offered a space to improvise narrative ways of being. The streets filled a gap that wasn’t being provided for at home or at school:

Growing up as youngsters in the United States of America...we had nothin’ much to learn from. We got nothin’ but the streets. There’s the Bible, but that’s just paper.

However, living life according to a street logic requires some sort of social order. Therefore, the common story of a diasporic youth usually includes a connection to the social formations called gangs. Gangsterism is a line of flight, a way of being, for

* Name has been changed.

34 Here I am using the concept of “line of flight” that Deleuze and Guittari, also speak of the line of flight, a line which marks both the terminality and the transformation of a
minority groups in the States caught in economically invisible slots. Gangs are, in this interpretation, minoritarian survival strategies. In his book called Bandits, E.J. Hobsbawm posits: “Deeds that were at the time perceived as criminal turn out to be acts of protest against the colonial authorities’ interference and authority—the type of action usually referred to as social banditry” (as quoted in van Woerkens, 2002:35). These youngsters improvised into groups of social bandits, gangs, strapped with master building codes adapted to street codes. They applied their mana to the street codes, and in so doing, created something of a reversion: the Tongan Thug was born.

According to Toa, the Tongan Crip Gang was an act of Unification although it lacked the kind of vertical organization like the Italian, Chinese or Russian Mafias have:

I wouldn’t call it an organization, cuz its not organized. I would just call it a bunch of Polynesians acting United. As far as being organized and stuff like that, I wouldn’t call it an organization, cuz its not. I wouldn’t call it an organization.

While Toa rejects the notion of the TCG being an vertically organized group like the mob, he brings up an important idea that Polynesian gangs are a horizontal organization: a grassroots manifestation of what would seem to be an inherent Polynesian impulse towards organic Unity.

I am posted at the lobby of the Sugarhouse dollar movies in Salt Lake City, watching five or six young Tongan guys playing arcade games. Without a word they turn rhizomatic formation. See A Thousand Plateaus. Also, the rap group Gangstarr, sings about “lines taking flight” in their song “Robbin Hood Theory” on the album Moment of Truth.
to exit the building, surrounded by an unseen force, like how a flock of birds turns in perfect coordination, one after the other in precise increments that are invisible to the naked eye. With this imperceptibility of singular moves they seem to beat as an organic whole. Any military in the world would die for such exact execution. The Federal Drug Wars of the 1980s had created a volatile and active underground drug economy that constantly needed labor. Tongan youth, already confederated into militant minoritarian LA-style gang formations, plugged into the extralegal economy and participated in the volatile drug markets that operate across every state in the union. The Federal Drug Wars of the 1980s during Reagan’s years in the presidency began what Christian Parenti, in his book *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis*, calls a “criminal justice militarization”. Because of the federal laws enacted during the 1980s, the extralegal drug economies were rife with risks but also full of growth opportunities. For teenage illegal immigrants, who were already unable to secure employment in a number of markets due to lack of documentation or racism, the drug economies provided a viable and sporadically lucrative form of employment, not to mention a lot of street status and credibility.

The 1990s was the time when it all broke off in Salt Lake City for the Tongans. I had just moved from Southern California to Salt Lake City with my family in 1993. The first week of high school that year, 17-year old Tongan ‘Asi Mohi attended a Zap and Rogers concert at the Triad Center in downtown Salt Lake City. The concert was packed with gangsters from all the major sets, factions who came together to enjoy Zap and Roger’s mixture of old school melodies, electronic cadences and sexy synthesizers. In the course of the evening, ‘Asi shot and killed a white boy whom the media portrayed as
being an all-American kid not looking for trouble baseball player. Word on the street knew that the white boy was claiming, and that it was ‘Asi who was actually slated to become an athlete star football player at West High with perhaps a college scholarship ahead of him. But ‘Asi’s dream of becoming a football college athlete was never highlighted in media reports. He was depicted as a savage monster, and became in a way the poster boy for the Tongan Gangster— armed, hyperviolent and out of control. ‘Asi was tried and convicted and currently serves his sentence at the Point of the Mountain, along with many other Tongans and Polynesians who were coded in similar ways within the logic of the system. The media’s treatment of Asi’s case was indicative of the mainstream community’s perception of Tongan gangs: a young, dark, hyperviolent criminal threatening the white, property-owning order of “Zion”. Unintelligible rhythms on the landscape. Thugs run amok.

In Salt Lake City during the course of the 90s, a frenzy of media attention was cast towards any criminal case involving “gang activity” or “alleged gang activity”, and since media blocks feed on sensationalizing things, anything involving a Polynesian youth was immediately considered “alleged gang activity”. Where the media trained its surveillance, civil society was sure to follow. Media and State surveillance and terrorism went through the roof, especially as government funds were funneled into new organizations and projects like the Salt Lake Area Gang Project created in 1989, when the federal funding from the War on Drugs started kicking down stateway. The Salt Lake Area Gang Project is a federally funded, multi-jurisdictional organization that includes the Federal Bureau of Investigations, Utah Division of Investigation, the Utah Department of Corrections, Utah State Division of Youth Corrections, United States
Attorney's Office, eight city police departments (Salt Lake, Murray, Sandy, Midvale, West Jordan, South Jordan, West Valley), and one School District Police Department (high schools in America usually have at least one fulltime police officer on duty). Its mission is to "identify, control, and prevent criminal gang activity" and to "provide intelligence data and investigative assistance to law enforcement agencies".

One friend recalls numerous occasions where state and even federal agents staked out and even trespassed his family's garage in Glendale with no warrant and no reasonable cause. And plenty more incidents like that. Glendale and other Westside neighborhoods became subject to panoptic surveillance. Take, for example, "The Partyline", a free phone number where multiple callers could chat over the phone, and heavily used by the minority population, was thought by a number of folks I know to actually be a police surveillance operation looking to gather information on the social lives of local teenagers. Whether or not it was remains in question, but I seriously call it into consideration. Why would there be a free number where multiple callers could call, free of charge, and exchange information? Perhaps I was just paranoid. But paranoia was rampant in Salt Lake City at that time.

Civil paranoia and xenophobia, particularly amongst white middle class, was palpable. The criminal color-coding built upon a long history of both general American and particular Mormon racial hierarchies, intensified as it tends to do during periods of war hysteria (the War on Drugs) and economic depression (Reaganomics). I'll never forget how Manu, a Salt Lake-raised deportee, described the civilian on civilian surveillance in Salt Lake City during the 90s:
We did a gang of dirt, and that’s how Tongans was known, was feared—basically feared. Got to a point to where you show up at a restaurant or show up somewhere and they’re like, “Oh my gosh, there’s a Tongan gangster, grab your purses, your goods, make sure your car’s locked.” I mean, it got to that point.\textsuperscript{35}

State surveillance of civilians, regardless of class, increased. Utah turned to Los Angeles models of police para-militarization. The Training Section of the Utah Highway Patrol (UHP) requested special training from Arrest Control Tactics (ACT) Instructors at the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. By 1994, the UHP had implemented a Civil Disorders Unit (CDU) with four 12 member squads to form a single platoon. Their first deployment, accompanied by members of the “Safe and Sober Squad” on Memorial Day Weekend in 1995 upon campers and beachgoers at Lake Powell, citing that a “lawless atmosphere” during past years had resulted in “numerous criminal activities”. The basic premise of the CDU was that “the presence of well trained and properly equipped personnel will be a deterrent to civil disorder”. Every member of the UHP was also issued “O.C.” (oleoresin capsicum solution or “pepper”) spray. Pepper spray “is one more non-lethal tool which all troopers now have available to them as they confront hostile subjects.” Among other moves towards a hostile and aggressive approach to civilian relations, in 1995, the UHP purchased 250 M-14 military surplus rifles. The .308 caliber, semi-automatic, gas powered rifle was a “welcome addition to the Patrol’s

\textsuperscript{35} Talanoa Session, 4/4/05.
arsenal”. The M-14 rifle allowed Patrolers an effective range of more than 200 yards. I suppose during a routine traffic stop, an officer of the law might need an M-14. But, come on now. It does seem unlikely, no matter how rowdy the situation.

On Sunday, September 25, 1994, two Westside gangsters meet in the westside Smith’s grocery store parking lot on 900 West and 800 South in Glendale and in a battle reminiscent of the wild wild west, murder each other dead. Two days later, during a reactionary news conference, Governor Leavitt kindly offers Salt Lake City Mayor Deedee Corradini state assistance, giving the incident the air of a serious state emergency. The following day, twelve Utah Highway Patrol troopers are assigned to patrol in Westside neighborhoods, joining a number of surveillance operations already underway citywide at different levels of development.

Operations like the “Seed & Weed” initiative, which was unveiled in 1991 as a solution to Salt Lake City’s “increasing crime and violence problems most often associated with gang activity and illegal narcotics trafficking”. Salt Lake City government received federal funding to conduct a Case Study on a Target Area which would utilize “a two-pronged strategy of ‘weeding’ out violent offenders, drug traffickers, and other criminals by removing them from the targeted area, and ‘seeding’ the area with human services and neighborhood revitalization efforts.” You’ll never believe where the “Target Area” was. The Target Area just happened to be the most heavily populated Tongan ‘hoods in Utah: Glendale, Poplar Gove, and Rose Park. The Case Study had determined that this Target Area had seen “an influx of criminal groups from California and illegal immigrants from Mexico [which] are reportedly responsible

for an increase in drug trafficking within the city". Mexicans have been in and out of Utah for generations, much like they've been in and out of many states across the Union—picking fruit, washing dishes, digging ditches, doing the dirty work white folks didn’t generally want to do. With their willingness to migrate as demands and seasons required, they have provided the American economy with invaluable labor assistance. Mexicans have been the backbone of the labor class for decades, yet have been treated like criminals with the waxing and waning of immigration law. So is there really an “influx” of illegal immigrants from Mexico running drugs through Salt Lake City? In fact, there are probably more Mexicans running soapy water over the dirty dishes of the city’s restaurants than running drugs. And as for the influx of criminal groups from California, that’s a thinly veiled way to point to the Polynesian gangs that migrated through diasporic family connections between California and Utah.

The Salt Lake Area Gang Project believed that citywide, gang membership increased by 116 percent between 1992 and 1995, and it was also estimated by the Violent Crimes Task Force that one-third of the total number of listed dangerous fugitives were arrested in the Target Area in less than a 1-year period. In one 6-month period the Target Area was home to 62 drive-by shootings, 84 percent of the city’s total for the same period. Consider the following Weed & Seed map:
This “Target Area” was home to every Utah-deported Tongan I spoke with during my research in Tonga in 2005. This target Area consisting of 6.4 square miles had a
population of almost 22,000, 13.3 percent of the population of SLC, with an unemployment rate of 6.4%. 25% of the residents live below the poverty line. The Seed & Weed Case Study was implemented with City funding throughout the early 1990s and culminated in a 1994 application for Salt Lake City to gain status as a National Performance Review Lab site for which the City was selected. This legitimated Salt Lake City for qualification to apply for further federal funding. By the late 90s, Salt Lake City was selected to receive $2.2 million for neighborhood crime prevention under the Comprehensive Community Program, a federal program similar to the Seed & Weed Project, funded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). 6.4 square miles of Salt Lake City containing 13.3 percent of the city’s population was surveilled and studied from 1991 to 1994, like rats in a maze or monkeys in a cage. During this surveillance, meticulous records were kept as the intense game of coding and capturing criminals was performed for policy and agency analysts and state professionals. It all paid off. The Weed and Seed Case Study project ultimately led to Salt Lake City getting millions of federal dollars to funnel into the multi-billion dollar business of coding and catching criminals. 6.4 square miles became the most profitable piece of land for state prospectors looking to make a dollar. So the story goes like this: invest and watch the inhabitants of 6.4 square miles of land and make millions of dollars. This is the business of weeding and seeding.\(^{37}\) Weeding undesirable and dangerous bodies, and casting them to the next big profit-making machine—the corrections system. Cast away the weeds. Then “seed” the area with community-based surveillance projects (i.e. get civilians to terrorize each

other) and continue surveilling those citizens. With such machinations in place, a thug consciousness was created. As I posted in my earlier chapter, Thug consciousness is created from power tripping operations of surveillance that are meant to keep poor people in spatially confined positions. Thus, the Tongan Thug was created.

Poverty-stricken neighborhoods were subject to a cat-and-mouse game of life-threatening proportions. Once captured by governmental arms, targeted subjects became tangled inside the disempowering ill-logic of the justice system, which reacted to the increase of juvenile offenders by site-specific measures at corrections facilities like double bunking at youth detention facilities, expansion of the Genesis work camp, separate housing of serious and repeated youth offenders as well as initiatives which oiled the judicial system to speed up the process for certifying juveniles as adults so that even young teenagers could be tried as adults.

These initiatives indeed functioned like machines of capture, sending deviant bodies into jails, prisons, and ultimately with the help of concurrently-instituted legal changes in immigration law, aliens and even legal residents (green card holders) were freed up to be deported more quickly than ever before in US history. The weeding of bodies is a biopolitical practice that we know as “deportation”, but even that term was changed with the passing of the 1996 new immigration law. “Deportation” has been sanitized and reborn as “expedited removal”.

Nails in the Coffin:
The Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996

The legal and normative grid was becoming dense as new codes were added. The public paranoia and media sentiment that was projected onto new immigrants was followed by the layering of hasty ragtag legislative initiatives onto the already nearly
unintelligible state legal codes. And not just for the State of Utah. Federally, the 90s has become the decade where the government redefined an incredibly vast amount of its already convoluted immigration law.

Being in America has always been seen as a privilege, except when it came to the indigenous peoples, who were excluded despite their obvious right to be there. But that’s a whole other story. Excludable classes back in the day included the insane, the criminal and others who were liable to become a public charge. The fear of the public having to take charge of dangerous classes—paupers, vagrants and criminals—deviant beings, all—has been the main influence in the checkered construction of immigration law. The most gnarled parts of immigration law are about deportation and especially regard the criminal alien. As far back as America’s history extends, immigration law has been a convoluted mess:

Since 1882, the whole fabric of the immigration law has been so patched and re-patched, so amended and enlarged, that it has become a veritable crazy-quilt, recognizable only by those who know from use where each individual patch belongs…To no part of the law can the criticism more truly apply than to the provisions regarding deportation, listed as they are in a haphazard, hit or miss, unclassified fashion.

(Clark, 1969:54)

This insightful text was published in 1930, and points to the incredibly gnarled immigration law from the colonial codes up until that year, so one can only imagine that
seventy years more of reactive layering of more of the same has made the "crazy quilt" into a veritable quilt of insanity.

In legal terms, deportation is not seen as a punishment or penalty. This view sees that deportable aliens have not complied with immigration procedures and therefore, as an alien with limited rights, constitutional provisions of the right of trial by jury and the prohibition of cruel and unusual punishments have no application. Legal debate in deportation cases has included questioning the premise that deportation is not a punishment for crime, nor banishment. Yet as President Madison, a framer of the constitution, has said quite reasonably,

If the banishment of an alien from a country into which he has been invited as the asylum most auspicious to his happiness—a country where he may have formed the most tender connections; where he may have invested his entire property, and acquired property of the real and permanent, as well as the movable and temporary kind; where he enjoys under the laws, a greater share of the blessings of personal security and personal liberty than he can elsewhere hope for...moreover, in the execution of the sentence against him is to be exposed...possibly to vindictive purposes, which his immigration may have provoked—if a banishment of this sort be not a punishment, and among the severest of punishments it will
be difficult to imagine a doom to which the name can be applied (Clark, 1969:47).

A case from the early 20th century that spoke to this issue involved a man brought from Poland as a small boy. He was convicted twice of burglary, served two prison sentences, and was ultimately deported to Poland under the laws pertaining to criminal aliens. The judge in the case, Learned Hand, bemoaned the regretful legality of this man’s deportation. Judge Hand stated that the man was

...as much our product as though his mother had borne him on American soil. He knows no other language, no other people, no other habits, than ours; he will be as much a stranger in Poland as any one born of ancestors who immigrated in the 17th century (Clark, 1969:50).

However true and convincing to moral human sentiments, Judge Hand’s type of dissenting view has constantly been bulldozered over throughout the history of immigration law thus pointing to the reality that the American systems of justice are so overpowered and convoluted with written legal code that the human narratives that are fed through the system are chewed up and spit out into a jumble of human rights violations. The ideal of judges and lawyers being the social arbiters of moral light and reason has become a distant reality. Only narratives can answer the human rights questions. And narrative knowing is not privileged in formal court proceedings and especially not in deportation orders. There is a serious miscarriage of justice going on here.

During the 1990s, the legislative arm of government was quick to respond to immediate concerns of domestic and international policy with an intensification of anti-
immigrant policy (especially concerning criminal aliens). These new laws clearly illustrate a hysterical attitude towards immigrants. In 1988, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act (ADAA), was passed, a piece of legislation that had a quiet immigration rider which created a separate ground of deportation for serious crimes such as murder, drug trafficking or illegal trafficking of firearms or destruction devices and was the first immigration legislation to use the term “aggravated felony”. The ADAA was followed up by a decade of powerful cleaning house policy in the US. The Immigration Act of 1990 (IMMACT 90) began a steady and aggressive legal suffocation against aliens and permanent residents by limiting certain “discretionary relief” that criminal aliens had a prior appeal to (Chea: 2005). The Immigration and National Technical Correction Act of 1994 expanded the definition of aggravated felonies to include common, less serious non-violent crimes such as fraud, burglary, and theft. Two years later, two extremely harsh pieces of legislation were passed by a Republican congress and signed by a Democratic President (Clinton). They profoundly affected aliens and legal residents (green card holders) alike. The Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRAIRA) and the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (AEDPA) significantly continued to expand the definition and number of “aggravated felonies” for which criminal aliens could be deported. These Acts pounded nail after nail into the coffins of criminal aliens. In 2005, the REAL ID Act continued this anti-immigrant pressure by eliminating habeas corpus review for all deportation orders. Most importantly, these laws were retroactive, meaning crimes you committed even twenty years ago could get you deported.
Frankly, at this point, if you were a criminal and an alien in the US, the question you would be worried about was not so much “what is an aggravated felony?” but “what is not an aggravated felony?”. Steal a car? Get deported. Knock out a federal officer? Get deported. Forge a check? Get deported. Drink and drive? Get deported. Done any of these things ever in your life, no matter how long ago? That’s right: get deported. This list could go on, but you get the idea. Widespread criticism has questioned the human rights issues of these new laws, and critics across the board commonly call them “Draconian”, referring to the Athenian statesman Draco from the 7th century BC and his wide-ranging and harsh code of laws. In this web of ill-logic, the morality of the US Government must be questioned. There is a serious miscarriage of justice going on here.

As we can see, the 90’s was a pivotal decade that saw the US make great strides in cleaning up the riff raff through immigration law. The US captured the riff raff and put them in ever-expanding prisons, eventually planning to deport them if possible. There remains the fact that criminal aliens’ sentences are not commuted in order to deport them right away. As aliens, they are required to serve their sentences, paying their debt to society—a society in which they by official decree do not belong—and then on top of that, they get deported. Talk about killing two birds with one stone. This fact ties right into Angela Y. Davis’ idea that there exists a “prison industrial complex” which has developed to farm profits off the criminal body. As a brother being held captive at the Utah State Prison writes me,

Modern slavery is the penal system, the cash crop is the Drug War (a.k.a. “cocaine economics”); taxes ensure $ in a
billion dollar penal system; parallels with old slavery are undeniable.\textsuperscript{38}

So in this we see that the practice in the US is to keep criminal aliens as productive slaves-for-profit inside the billion-dollar corrections industry \textit{before} deporting them. Like an expendable object, humans are squeezed and discarded, with any recourse being a near impossibility. Upon completion of their sentences, criminal aliens are systematically weeded and removed. As Toa narrated, he was caught completely unawares of what lay ahead for him after parole:

I had everything lined out or whatever, and all of a sudden they came and said, "Roll up." I said, "What did I do?"

They said, "You just gotta roll up." I wasn't even worried, cuz I thought I was gonna parole. So parole day hits, and then I come out, and everybody that's paroling to the streets, go one way, and they tell me to turn up, to the visiting room. And I go to the visiting room, and there's this guy with this green jumpsuit on and I seen it said "Immigration and Naturalization".\textsuperscript{39}

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) maintains a regular presence in prisons across the country, compiling databases and creating chutes for the channeling of deportable criminal aliens. In 1997 the INS reported proudly:

In the FY1996, the INS removed a record 68,000 criminal and other deportable aliens—up 36 percent over results

\textsuperscript{38} Personal correspondence, 2003.

\textsuperscript{39} Talanoa Session, April 11, 2005.
achieved in FY 1995, itself a record year. The momentum has carried over in FY 1997. In the first of FY 1997 removals have increased by 28 percent for the same period in FY 1996.\textsuperscript{40}

Official reports like these are packed with statistics, numbers, facts and the like. These reports feed the legislative game, but they do not get us anywhere close to justice.

There is a deep and disturbing disconnect lurking in the relationship between the games of legitimation (how knowing is created) played out in the juridical and legislative branches of government, and these disconnects are played out in the lives of deported criminal aliens. The juridical and legislative are two branches of government that are especially supposed to be “for the people, by the people”. Yet these forms of government would seem to suffocate and slaughter narrative knowing, the kind of knowing that, in the final analysis, humans actually \textit{are born into and live by}.

We are born into a story already in progress and we live \textit{stories}, not statements of truth or fact. We are a combination of truths, half-truths, and complete and partial fallacies—this is the colorscale of the human condition. As Lyotard says, in the final analysis, narrative knowing creates the condition of possibility for us as humans to wrap our collectivity around “internal equilibrium and coexistence” by \textit{imagining} either new moves or new rules in the game of centering survival (1984:7). The Talanoa type of narrative practice—open-ended, rhizomatic approaches to facticity—are absent in these modern games of legitimation that are practiced in American lawmaking bodies and

courts. They are, as Bob Marley sings, the zero-sum games of a "technological inhumanity" that are taking us farther and farther away from internal equilibrium and coexistence. ∞
A new Line

A node is a point of no displacement. Uncommon carriers of uncommon rhythms, refusing the ruptures of defeat and deletion in the games of improvisation in a strange land, detached from the stem and returned to the Root, a new Line is begun.
Every deportee I met was a Poem in Exile, a living breathing poem in emotion, a carrier of uncommon rhythms. I can relate to them, they’re ultimate in liminality, in displacement, in diasporic consciousness, bookended by alienation on both ends. Thus they have a heightened sense of things... Emplaced in America, they improvised Tongan rhythms to create a diasporic identity. Their improvisations they bore proudly, but these same improvisations ultimately brought them interference and deletion from the game. From their flight, as they form a new line, they become emplaced in Tonga only to experience another displacement of their imagined center, this time flipping the script, where America becomes imagined and Tonga turns to reality.

Most left Tonga as babes in arms in the late seventies and early eighties, around the same time I was born to my parents in Utah. Only a few of the twelve I talked with could remember leaving Tonga, and the oldest was only thirteen years old when he left. But all held precise memories of the coming back, of foki ki api—the return home. For them it was one of those crystalline moments that divides all that was with all that will be.

*What was it like touching down in Tonga for the first time?* This question always brought strong emotions. I could see clear images and sense memories brush across their face. Sometimes they’d give me an ambivalent smile, or a frustrated shake of the head, as if to say, *Damn, it was a bitch* and sometimes a concessive sigh, as if to say, *Shit, seems like yesterday.* I always watched the eyes because when recalling a specific moment, a moment like that, the eyes communicate the most intense emotions and reveal
more than words. Drow\textsuperscript{41} looked up and caught the image out of the left corner of space. He smiled as remembered how he sat on the plane until every other passenger had gotten off. Just sat. Finally the flight attendant had to come up to him and tell him he \textit{had to} deplane. Unlike Drow, most deportees are escorted by two federal agents (Drow’s got off in New Zealand). The agents uncuff you at the airport and as John says,

\begin{quote}
they say \textit{“You’re here, you’re home, go home”;}
that’s what they \textit{tell you at the airport. “You’re free to go, go home.” Free to go where? This ain’t my home.}\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

The main question on the mind is, \textit{are you for reals? You’re free to go, go home... This ain’t my home.} Its such a paradox. Free involves a choice, and this feels like a bigger prison. \textit{Free to enter into exile?} Manu remembers that the only thing he could think to do in a surreal situation like that was to get a drink, something to calm his nerves, set him straight. He hitches a ride to town and gets off at the closest bar. What do you know, who else is sitting at the bar but the two federal agents that had just uncuffed him, they’re bunking up at Hotel Nuku’alofa. What a small world (yes, Tonga is \textit{very} small). They all sit down and enjoy a cold one, and they even give Manu twenty US dollars to get on his feet, or at least to enjoy the rest of the evening with a nice buzz. And that’s how his life in Tonga began for Manu.

Some of us diasporic offspring have imagined Tonga with Technicolor backdrops, moving scenes of swaying coconut palms in Hollywood backlots, postcards and home movies, internet chatting, stories from the parents. Some of us have never even seen the

\textsuperscript{41} Name has been changed to conceal identity. Talanoa Session, 6/8/05.
\textsuperscript{42} John Kolomatangi, Talanoa Session, 4/12/05.
ocean. Go home? This aint my home. Unrecognizable programs…and coming straight from prison? In prison you learn lessons, you learn to do time, don’t let time do you. You get your self a program to bend to your will, so that it doesn’t bend you. But bending yourself to Tonga? Are you welcomed home, like prodigal sons, do you wear your roots upon your chests? Do you lose your center?

John was the one deportee I talked with who left the latest in life—age thirteen. All the others were babies or toddlers under the age of three. Sam, who left at two months of age, said, “I came with a different, I would say, culture. I couldn’t understand this culture, I couldn’t understand the Tongan way. And I’m still trying to understand it as of right now.” If a point is a home, and a line is a way of being that moves us through space, then perhaps we are always moving lines, with points in between. Line meets point, after point after point perhaps into infinity. When you come to the end of your line, you reach a point. Either a point of no return, where you carry on essentially changed, or you start something new, something altered, improvised and move along the new line—the line of flight. Do all lines bend? Some are straight to the feel, others are winding and wandering, some move and get caught up on the run, others bask in stasis. But there’s no such thing as a crooked line, for lines are lines, and there’s no such thing as a crooked line, for if we all come from the same point, eventually we will all return to the same point of origin. Lines always end, and then begin again.

What was it like touching down in Tonga for the first time? Toa remembered most prominently the sense memory of how the humidity slammed into him as he walked down the steps of the plane, saying, “It was thicker than a mother.” It was the first time he’d been in a tropical climate—besides the three months he spent in Tonga as a
newborn, and he didn’t remember that. I asked Toa about the whole process of
deportation from prison, and the he broke it off like this. His story is typical:

Toa: They took everybody to Colorado—guess where they took me? Las
Vegas. Only Tongan in the whole place, that gave me more problems, cuz
then I had to prove myself all over again.
Lani: How long were you in there?
T: From July to November.
L: And then in November you were deported. How did your family take
the news when they found out you were deported?
T: They wanted to get me a lawyer. But I was like, its cool, cuz this judge
ain’t budging so I’ll just take my chances with Tonga.
L: You had made a peace with it, accepted it?
T: I accepted it, I don’t know how much peace I made.

As Toa’s experience suggests, the deportation process is not just a paper-pushing
bureaucratic experience. It is an experience that is marked and accompanied by strong
feelings and emotions—it is an act of force that affects the heart. Manu brimmed with
strong feelings that reflected the difficulty of achieving “acceptance”, let alone of making
a “peace” with being deported by the US government:

I didn’t ask the United States, or the Tongan King,
to let me come back. I didn’t ask that. They came
at me with that.

Obviously, Manu was caught unawares that his youthful crimes would end in
deportation. Indeed, it was while he was running around Salt Lake City as a young
teenager that the laws came into effect that would change his life forever. Some of the
deportees I talked with were aware of their illegal status in the US. Several others,
however, had no clue they weren’t American citizens. For one reason or another (often financial), they had never become naturalized and were therefore illegal aliens. Thus, levels of acceptance and peace varied on a case-by-case basis, depending on how aware the person was of the structural system that triggered their deportation. Sam said his dad tipped him off about deportation when he first got locked up, saying “Son, you better start thinking of what you’re gonna do when you parole, cuz they’re probably gonna deport you.” So, while locked up, Sam pursued educational opportunities to prepare himself for a possible employment in Tonga. Currently, Sam teaches elementary school.

However, educational preparation aside, it is the emotional effect that created the most challenging adjustments. Coming to terms with the feelings that came after deportation was more natural for some than for others. Just like anything, there is a colorscale of human behavior. Displacement doesn’t come easy and becoming a node is a constant work in progress. Becoming a whole person between two points, America and Tonga, is the most prominent challenge amongst deportees adjusting to life in Tonga. Having their fixed center (in the US it was Tonga, in Tonga it becomes the US) migrate creates challenges in the heart (our center). Most people can go along their lives without this kind of displaced center crisis. But if it happens to you, what can you do? Where, between two points, do we face our moment of truth, our ecliptic plane of being?

The deportees I believe, above all else, are survivors, book-ended by some measure of alienation on both ends. They are a different kind of breed, if you will, set apart to carry unique rhythms. Any topic when refracted through the experience of a deportee is very telling because of their unique political subjectivity. The deportee, as a political agent, is in a constant state of rupture from the ordinary world because of the
liminal consciousness that comes from existence between reified identities and the subsequent inversion and reversioning which marks such liminality. For most, making a peace while being displaced from one home and emplaced in another home seemed to be a work constantly in progress. And why? Well, John breaks it down with a clarity of vision and poetic feeling:

We were treated as outcasts, not only because we were criminals, but we were treated that way because we speak English, or dress different, and say we’re “fia palangi” [wannabe white]... We were proud to be Tongan and to be rejected by our own people, that’s not only painful, but could be harmful. Cuz these are desperate people we’re dealing with... somebody who’s been stripped of everything that means something to them, everything they can relate to---the States, that’s all most of us knew... I say that’s a desperate person, he can do anything, cuz he ain’t got nothin’ much to live for. I’m not talking about the next guy, I’m talking about myself, that’s how I felt. I felt like doing some damage before I do myself, because I was filled with anger or hatred because of the rejection, or because I had nothing else to live for. Maybe few would say differently, they would say they found time to adjust or whatever, but for those who were really caught up in the American way of life, or whatever...I left when I was thirteen, so I remember some things about Tonga, but nineteen years, most
of my teenage years, formative time of life, all of that was in America.

In America, Tonga seems far away. Farther than Hawai‘i, farther than Hollywood could perhaps take us. Even though we felt Tongan rhythms from our genealogy, its hard to predict what it would be like to actually live in that dreamscape. There’s a song called *Dreamland*, I think Rita Marley sings it, that goes something like, *We’ll get our breakfast from the tree...take a ride on the waterfall, count the stars in the sky...and surely we’ll never die...and surely we’ll never die.* The songs and the images tell us that in Paradise we can get our breakfast from a tree, take a ride on a waterfall and count the stars in the sky—and Paradise can even give us the key to eternal life since, as the song suggests, Island Time is the closest thing to eternity we’re likely to experience in this world (*and surely we’ll never die*). But the reality of an island paradise is somewhat far removed from this type of dreamscape. Is Tonga the Technicolor Paradise of our imaginations, all palm trees and waterfalls? Sam says,

I wasn’t thinking about no beaches or nothing like that. I was thinking, ‘I don’t know nothin’ out there, I don’t know what I’m gonna do.’ I didn’t know nobody, I can’t speak the language. I was thinking, ‘I’m gonna die out there’. 43

Of course, that would be my fear as well, that I would die before I learned how to survive in a strange land. Manu had a harsh awakening and a big reality check when he got to Tonga:

43 Talanoa Session, 4/12/05.
What I thought was Tonga, what I thought was paradise—was the opposite. You know what I’m saying? Where they say, ‘You can just live off of nothing’—yeah right, bullshit. You can’t live off of nothing. You can’t live off a shack and a candle. 44

How many people in Tonga are living off a shack and a candle? Manu thought you couldn’t live off a shack and a candle, yet many are doing it, shit, he was doing it. And many people get their breakfast off a tree. So what’s the problem with a shack and a candle? Do we need electricity and modern technology to survive?

It seems that the constant line here between a deportee’s life in America and their life in Tonga is a culture of poverty. This poverty is more explicit in the States than in Tonga, a so-called “small island dependent state” and “third world country”, in which most people are relatively materially poor yet can manage that poverty by relying on the ways of the old folks—the ways of knowing on which survival has always hung. Sam says that right now things are at a point where Tongans are in between a modern consumer sociality and a reciprocal, land-based sociality:

The families out here, if their lights get cut off, I just look at them, ‘So what?—We had it for this long, for that much time, now we can just use a lamp.’ I mean that’ll work too, we can just take our food and put it over a woodfire, eat like that. But people don’t want to live like that anymore, cuz

44 Talanoa Session, 4/5/05.
everybody's got electricity and stoves and TV's and stuff like that, so, but you just see like the older people and they can still do it.

They can still do it. They still remember. They can still do it, they can (and simply do) still survive on a shack and a candle, they won't die like so many in America fear, if they don't have electricity, packaged food or a television. They know how to organize themselves within the codes of nature, and they lock in beautifully. And if you can lock into the codes of nature, survival is the result. Survival is the name of the game. The modern society develops to exclude the codes of nature.

Take the recent Hurricane Katrina in the US. The human devastation of that natural disaster in the media is framed in terms of race and class, and rightly so, but we might get more mileage out of the devastating lesson if we can frame it as an inability of American government or citizenry (any color) to lock into the codes of nature: while the rich white got out of the city through access to machine technologies (cars, monies, etc.), the poor black were left, like excess rubbish that was neither coded securely into the "machine" nor into the perhaps more threatening "nature". The stories of these poor black families, in every instance, are about survival, and human survival's relationship to both technology and nature. The media has read it as a result of a disorganized government. But governments can't lock into codes of nature—that is a cultural trait, with rhythmic roots, tied to human behavior. And behavior is difficult to crack, since behavior is tied to the human heart, a mystery if ever there was one.
Toa went out to ‘uta (the bush) and learned how to farm with his uncle. Now he has new survival skills to add to his repertoire of street survival tactics, which might not serve him in this strange land.

“There was a short pause and then with a deadpan expression on his face, he replied very pointedly, “I came from prison.”

Coming straight from a prison environment, intense in its rigid disciplinary controls, Toa learned to improvise to an island rural vibration. Island survival was a different game than urban survival. For example, Sam talked about the basic shock his biorhythms got upon arrival. Things as natural as speaking, breathing and eating became laborious and conscious:

Probably for the first few months, I only spoke five sentences for the first two or three months. When people talked to me, I understood it, but not that very good. I couldn’t speak it, the only thing I knew was yes or no. And food—it was hard for me to adjust to the food. I got sick, I would have stomach aches. The air—I couldn’t breath this air. This place was completely—I didn’t have no clue how this place would be, how would I live. I mean, I thought sometimes, “I’m gonna die here, if I don’t start thinking right”.

I asked.
For Taniela\textsuperscript{45}, adjusting to Tonga wasn’t so shocking. “I just used my common sense, and it got me by.” Another told me that there wasn’t much culture shock because Tonga was on a fast-track to becoming technologically adept in a Western sense: “Shit, they got more cars here [on Tongatapu] than any other island in Tonga.”

Looking back, Sam says Tongans in the States may actually struggle more being poor in an industrialized place. As he reminisces, he is careful to be balanced:

We struggled there [the States] too...I mean, we struggled over there, we froze, we didn’t have no heat, we had cold water. I think we struggled more in the States than I did here. And that kind of helped me, for when I came out here.

Adjusting to life in Tonga was not all too troublesome after the initial learning phase for the majority. Sam continues,

It might be a different way of living but they’re [deportees] not really struggling. I mean, there’s a lot of guys I know back here, are doing good. Just because now they understand how it’s gonna be like, and they’re starting to understand the way of life here.

Most I talked with concurred with Sam’s approach: now that they were here and had gotten used to it, you just go on with it. Toa emphasized the saying that all prisoners learn in confinement: \textit{Do your time, don’t let your time do you}. He said that the unique

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{45} Name has been changed to protect identity. Talanoa Session, 4/15/05
lessons of *time* awareness could also be applied to the deportation experience. John emphasized that many deportees feel like Tonga was in fact a bigger prison. One deportee told me that he preferred doing prison time. “How come?” I asked. “Well, it’s just like prison here, you got a big yard, you go home you got a little cell…it’s the same thing.”

**Uncommon Rhythms**

I felt a sort of telepathic connection with Drow immediately. When I first got out there, he was working at this restaurant where my friend Josie and I stopped by for a bite to eat and discuss my research project after I first touched down. Josie was working as a writer for *Tongan Woman*, and we discussed the perimeters and spaces that the narrative style our film project would take. As we sat there, I saw this tall guy all cornrowed out saunter out the back door for a cigarette break. *He looks so familiar,* I thought. Maybe it was something in the way he lifted his eyebrows, or perhaps the directness of his gaze (*Tongan Tongan guys don’t make eye contact*), or maybe it was the drawled arc of his step and a tenseness carried in his shoulders—in short, the whole rhythm and energy that surrounded him was familiar to me. It felt like home. It wasn’t until nearly two months later that I met up with him and I found out he had gone to East High and I had gone to Highland High, rival schools just sixteen blocks from each other.

∞------------------------------------------------------------------∞

I’m standing at the bus station by the wharf, with three other individuals—two of whom are deportees, all of us overseas-raised. I don’t know what it is, but I feel this pressure on me. I look up to the other people waiting at the bus station are staring at us. To my left and all to my right were wide open eyeballs, just watching us. I wasn’t used to
the staring that goes on in Tonga, coming from America where you mind your own business and let the next guy do whatever it is they do. But here in Tonga, a small place, one people....if you’ve got a different rhythm, you get watched, surveilled. See, at that bus stop, our little diasporic circle couldn’t be coded, from our body language to the English we rattled off. Our diasporic force field was creating unintelligible rhythms in the Tongan landscape. Alien encounters. Are they one of us? One who will care?

∞__________________________________________________________∞

How can you tell a deportee? I ask Taniela46.

He responds, Just the way they carry themself, like really freely, really carefree about what the next person thinks about their conduct, like hella nonchalant about it.

I continue, So a Tongan who was born and raised in Tonga would carry themselves different?

Yeah, they’d be more like self-conscious about the way they carry themselves in public. I am beginning to draw out some things that culturally might be said to set American deportees apart from Tongans: freedom of movement, an ability to improvise (going off-script), and a fluency in the language (spoken and body) of the streets. Their originality and flow came from urban street rhythms, as they rebelled from their home life and from the school systems, to become coded as criminals.

The streets they grew up in are free-flow spaces, where improvisation and breaking are allowed, encouraged and rewarded. We’re waiting outside the DVD shop, and I spot Taniela across the street. “Hey! Wut up!” I yell too loudly but I don’t care, and he crosses over. I ask him what he’s up to. He’s just chillin’ across the street outside

46 Name has been changed to protect identity. Talanoa Session 4/15/05.
the Day and Nite Club. How is it in there? I ask. It’s cool, he responds. I introduce him to the girls in the car. We chop it up a bit, he’s so sociable and friendly, and within a few moments he’s already spun off at least five different jokes and stories, which have me in the giggles. I remember I owe him ten dollars, so I pass it to him. We tell him we may stop by later, but first we gotta go take these DVDs home. We start up the car and he crosses the street. As we’re pulling out, one of the girls, raised in Tonga, comments, “You don’t hear that every day.” “Hear what?” I ask. “You know, his accent.” Damn, I think as it dawns on me, he does have an accent—a rhythm and a cadence that is strictly Californian.

We’re sitting at my cousin’s house, the family has gone to town, and Sam has stopped by to do the interview. His wife and young son sit on the couch across from us and watch cartoons on TonFon, Tonga’s only cable television, owned by the Crown Prince and his cronies. I’ve been wondering what sets apart the American deportees.

“How can you tell the difference between an American deportee and ones that get sent back from New Zealand or Australia for overstaying?” I ask.

“Them guys that come back from there, I mean, they’re straight Tongans anyways. I mean New Zealand’s right there and Australia’s right there…But the one’s that come back from the US, its obvious, right when you see someone from the US, you know he’s from the US.”

“How can you tell?” (I’m so curious).

“Just the way he walks, just the way he dresses, just the way he talks, its all obvious,” Sam replies.
Unintelligible rhythms on the landscape. In the Kingdom, the newly arriving deportees are greeted with a sort of fear-mongering from all sides, as is typical in any Alien Encounter. This happens at all alien encounters, doesn’t it—Who are you? Are you one of us? One who will care? What are the “alien” rhythms and myths that you see before you see the real person? The “alien” encounter becomes a space for the production of myths—stories that try to explain the existence of such perceived differences. Sam affirms,

There are myths. I mean some people look at deportees like they’re straight garbage. Some people don’t. First thing that they think about people that’s deported is, ‘What did he do?’, you know. ‘I don’t trust them, he’s been in jail’. Stuff like that. Some of its true and some of its not.47

So you’re saying that the truth must be found in fractals, not wholes. What you’re saying is that fact and fiction are often difficult to differentiate. And what about official discourse, what myths have they made up? I didn’t ask too many questions of the administration, but I had my feelers out. It was glaringly apparent that class-consciousness was ironically subconscious and ingrained in the social body, although this was changing while I was there, as exemplified by the civil unrest and strikes, indicating a stirring of commoner class rejections of economic stratification.

47 Talanoa Session, 4/12/05.
A local graffiti artist tagged up on the wall the following statement: “A revolution is the finest art of civil disobedience” and “Democracy is elite”. Watching this renegade street artist’s work which was prominent around Nuku’alofa set a striking backdrop for the strikes.

Tongan society is a highly stratified monarchical system, with rigid hierarchical class divisions between royalty, nobles, educated/business elite, palangi’s and other foreigners (Chinese and Indians) and commoners. Apparently, the deportees fit in beneath commoners as the lowest class of “aliens”, even after foreigners like the Chinese and Indians. Most of this can probably be attributed to the stigma of incarceration, and the misunderstandings that Tongan society carries about criminality in America, which is based on popular American culture, which in and of itself erases issues of class and
poverty by sensationalizing criminals as nihilistic and anarchist—in short as violent and terrorizing thugs. It seems that Tongan society is strictly coded within a 20th century Faka Tonga script that doesn’t allow for the harmonious insertion of diasporic rhythms, which would explain all the brouhaha about deportees. 20th century Faka Tonga is concerned with a script that can’t account for the diasporic reversioning and improvisations that occurred overseas. So when these guys come back, it’s like they are aliens. As John said, it is difficult to deal with that type of rejection, since “everything we did [in the States] wrong or right, we did it being proud as Tongans”. Tongans at home don’t seem to understand that the diasporic offspring are Tongans too. Where’s the love at?

My research showed that commoners, as well as those from the educated elite and the noble class, carried a certain xenophobia and snobbery towards deportees. I realized Sam was correct, a lot of Tongan society views them as “straight garbage”. Which explains why one deportee told me that, “when you say the word ‘deportee’, its like a really bad thing to almost everybody” and why he didn’t want to be named or even associated outright with my research. This type of social snobbery upset me quite a bit, and yet did not surprise me, for I had seen the type of racial snobbery that white people do in the States. One friend from the educated elite reminded me that, if they hadn’t met me, they probably wouldn’t have ever met the people they met through me, and then went on to name a couple deportees that I kicked it with. It got me thinking about how subconscious this class snobbery was in Tongans of a certain position. It seemed to me that their minds and hearts were closed to the reality that we were all from the same root. Of course, they “belonged” to Tonga, and I was thinking along the hafekasi line of never
belonging anywhere, a line of zero, a line of no displacement. It got me thinking about the American street ethic of “keeping it real” and how all class snobbery and division can be seen as an imposition of fakeness over the reality that we are all spiritual beings with a common ancestry—One Love, One Heart. In a way, despite my frustration, I felt sorrow for the social binding that kept so many of my Tongan brothers and sisters in lives circumscribed and suffocated by an artificial front. Its an artifice that covers the reality of ‘Ofa which is at the center of Faka Tonga passed down from our ancestors, but which somehow has been covered by a 20th century Faka Tonga that has more do with preserving the power of the elite.

Caroline Fusimalohi-Tupoulahi, Director of Central Planning Department in Tonga, gave a presentation at the Seminars of Pacific Business hosted by the Asia Pacific School of Economics and Government and the Australian National University on May 3, 2004 entitled “Tonga: Economic Outlook and Associated Reform Efforts”. In her presentation, she cited deportees as an “emerging social issue” alongside youth unemployment, drug problems, youth violence, abuse, discrimination, increasing environmental pollution, depletion of coastal marine resources, primary school resources, and poor quality of health facilities48. As an easily identifiable social group, the deportees often serve as scapegoats for many of other “emerging social issues”, and since they are ex-convicts, they are often blamed for rising crime and general social disorder.

Law enforcement officers seem to have found their own ways to deal with the emerging social issue of deportees. From what I could gather, the police in Tonga use a brute force with most of their charges, which is quite acceptable and appropriate in a

Tongan cultural context\(^{49}\). The use of physical intimidation and force seems to be a common method for extracting a confession out of a person—whether guilty or not. The deportees I talked to cited that the act of “pleading the fifth” is often seen as sedition and unwillingness to cooperate. I was told by Drow, *What they do is, if you get caught up, like go and rob a house but they aint got no evidence on you, what they do is they take you to the police station, and checc this out...After midnight, they take you up to this room on the second floor, and they beat you, all different ways, they just beat your ass, and try to get a confession out of you...its that confession shit.* While it seems that all criminals in Tonga are subjected to routine beatings, Sam says that deportees get a “special session”:

> When it comes to the deportees I mean they overdo it. They have a little special session with them. I know some, they’ve been with the police and they’ve put a lickin’ on them guys, I mean they put them in the hospital and everything. I mean I’ve seen situations where deportees went to a dance and get beat up by people in the dance, and then after that when the police come, the police ends up beating them up cuz they think these guys started it. I’ve seen that happen.

\(^{49}\) Helen Morton discusses the role of socially sanctioned violence in Tongan culture in her book *Becoming Tongan: An Ethnography of Childhood*: “Throughout childhood and adolescence, physical punishment is the most common form of discipline used in Tonga” (p. 198).
John emphasizes that for the past six years at least, the local cops are quick to round up the Usual Suspects, who usually happen to be deportees, and hold them, beat the hell out of them, only to find out later they had nothing to do with the alleged crimes. Two I talked with had experienced just this kind of brutality and had been hospitalized from police beatings. One had his face swell up like a watermelon, and another was beaten with a wooden bench which would have continued if his lawyer hadn’t of gotten past the officers on duty and interrupted the beating demanding that they stop. I spoke informally off the record with his lawyer, who confirmed this. I did not talk with any police officers to get their side of the story. The truth of the matter is that, yes, these deportees are convicted “criminals”, ex-cons, which in and of itself is a complicated label. In my last chapter, I tried to paint the complicated nature of the America and its shady criminal justice system, to give you an idea of the many shades of grey that crisscross the lines of criminality. If you’ll remember, many of the “deportable” crimes are not violent crimes per se, but can even be petty crimes with “gang enhancements” which can prop up misdemeanors up a notch to aggravated felonies. For example, a conviction of driving under the influence could very well get a deportable person deported. But, as they say, crime is crime and these fellas didn’t get locked up for singing too loudly in church. If you do the crime, you gotta do the time. But once your debt to a society that has been paid in full, and you touch down in a foreign homeland, do you continue to conduct thuggish things on the streets and in the villages of Tonga? If criminality is produced by a social system, how does criminality translate within two separate systems? Some deportees are totally reformed. Some left the Thug Life behind in the holding cells of the Beast. Manu emphatically denies that deportees have any role in rising crime of Tonga:
They say us deportees made the crime rates come up. I don't believe that, hell nah. A lot of us is out here, I'd say more than 90% of the deportees who were sent out here are doin' good.

Sam, always feeling the many sides of the same story, says it's mixed, and depends on the individual:

I can see that the more deportees come out here, crime has gone up. That ain't no lie. I mean, the more that come, crime is going up and it's not just them committing the crimes, it's the kids that go with them. I mean the kids that's around them guys. You can see it, these guys look at them like they're all big shots you know what I mean.\(^\text{50}\)

Big shots only because they carry a cultural capital that is a hot commodity. They carry it in their rhythms of speech, movement, style, flow and in their totally original improvisations. If your cultural capital is your most valuable commodity, then why not use it? If you didn't want a working poor position in the States, what would make you want one in Tonga, where the wages are infinitesimally dismal? Most I talked with had a hard time adjusting to the wages, which weren't living wages, ranging from T$1 to T$3 an hour. Most of Tonga agreed, however, as seen in the Civil Servant strike of August 2005 that lasted over five weeks. In a way, Manu was prophetic as he narrated his experience of working for bullshit wages and trying to start a strike at his job long before

\(^{50}\) Talanoa Session, 4/12/05, audiocassette.
the Civil Servant Strike of 2005. Manu, a live wire, is so gifted with oratory skills with which he legitimated his many points. His narration is a bit long, but well worth the read. Keep in mind that Manu had this “little idea” well before the Civil Servants Strike of 2005:

I got to the point where I was working, and I had this little idea, so I was starting to spread the news to the guys, to my coworkers. They’re paying us 40 dollars a week, and we bustin’ ass. We’re the ones loading containers, unloading containers, and that’s back breaking job, you know what I’m saying. And they’re paying us 40 dollars a week? Why don’t we just go ahead and make a union, and stay? One day we just all stay, you know. When I was working at the hotel, Dateline Hotel, I was spreading that rumor. Next thing I know, all these little managers, supervisors, when they got word of it, they didn’t like it. And I was trying to go at them with it, cuz they Tongan, and that’s a Chinese that owns that damn hotel, you know. And I’m saying, ‘Take all you want, to survive’. These were folks comin’ from out-of-country, tryin’ to run this business and payin’ us peanuts to make miracle happen. You know what I’m saying. I mean, get somethin’ up in your head....If we all stay today, this business will start losing money. And they’ll wanna start to compromise at least to where—and you know if that happened? They turned around, and the next thing you know [pantomimes whispering], “You’re suspended!”...Out here, they turn around and stab you, they turn around and tell on you, and the next thing you know you’re out of a job when you
was tryin to help. Cuz I’m thinkin’, ‘They’re not thinkin’ big enough’. They’re still thinking small, they wanna be loyal and everything. At the same time they’re eating the crumbs off the floor. You see, there is no kind of Unity.  

The Unity he talks about is the Unity that the diasporic living brought out of him. In the States, you stuck together with other Tongans. Out here, it was dog eat dog. There were complaints about the Tongan ability to take a lot of crap from the people in power—after all, resisting the system in America is no easy feat, so to come to Tonga and see oppression of another order is bound to get you hot all over again—as they say, you get programmed to see the world in a certain way, and you keep seeing the same lessons in the same situations. Manu rightly deflects the state and civil criticism and blaming of deportees with the general mayhem and social disorder by offering a deft analysis of the widespread culture of corruption that bleeds its wicked course from the highest echelons of the Kingdom’s political hierarchy:

Don’t hate us because we come over here and start doin’ something dirty, you know what I’m saying. Cuz all them, man they’re more crooked than we are. There’s a whole lot of money of the ...of the people lost...you know what I mean? Where’s that at? And you wanna hate me because I’m trying to get a few bucks to support me and my family? So, I got a certain point of view.

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51 Talanoa Session, 4/5/05.
Manu is referring in particular to a sum of 20 million US dollars which was made from selling Chinese nationals Tongan passports for about $20,000 a pop around the time of the 1997 Hong Kong British switchover, which by the way, a lot of other countries were doing as well. But where it gets downright criminal is when the 20 million suddenly disappears, just like that. The proceeds were placed into a People’s Trust Fund and eventually were invested in an offshore account in the States, and, as can happen with electronic pathways, upon deposit, the entire 20 mil was immediately sucked out from that account and “lost” in electronic space. It was a complete set-up. Period. That money is gone. But, like all set-ups, it had to have inside support, as the reggae band Steel Pulse says: “One hand wash the other”. Steel Pulse calls crooked politicians “Poltricksters drinking human blood” and Bob Marley re-translates the Biblical scriptural phrase “Wickedness in High Places” by adding two words: “Wickedness in High and Low places”. But no one seems to be ‘fessing up to it, whether in High or Low Places. Not the King, not all the King’s men or all the King’s horses, not even his Jester, who was the one who convinced the King’s Men to place the money in the account in the first place. Seriously, no joke, the King made this clown banker, a palangi from San Francisco, his official Court Jester. And this Jester, he was the one who helped set up the offshore account. But sources that know, know that the buck doesn’t stop at him. He may be just a mule. This conspiracy involves more than meets the eye. In the end, they could not find that 20 mil again. Period. And all investigations have stopped, citing lack of progress and lack of funds. But recent sightings of some of the King’s Men have seen

52 Kalafi Moala gives a picture of this scandal from the perspective of the only independent newspaper in Tonga at the time, Taimi, in his book Island Kingdom Strikes Back. He also gives a backstory on the actors involved in the scandal.
them in luxury vehicles, in gambling joints where they have “High Roller” status, and the
like. Wonder where they got all that cash flow from, hm…

Let’s just say that the deportees—and a lot of other folks—are wise to the ways
that systems work, and even wiser to the ways to exploit the cracks in the system. While
the proverbial wool might be pliable enough to pull over the commoner class in Tonga
(and even this is changing rapidly) deportees are not exactly common commoners, they
are above all, uncommon carriers of uncommon rhythms. So, as Manu said, he’s got “a
certain point of view”, it’s a point of view that is powerful and rarified, and just plain
revolutionary within the framework of a constitutional monarchy like the Kingdom of
Tonga. When I asked Toa about his thoughts on politics out in Tonga he said, “It sucks,
it sucks, it sucks”. He continued: “To tell you the truth, I don’t care about the king or the
nobles. I wouldn’t care if he walked in here right now, I wouldn’t get up.” When I asked
about politics back home in the States, he succinctly recurred: “It sucks”. Even Sam,
who always had a multiply situated view of all topics we spoke of, like an octopus with
multiple feeling tentacles, was straight up about the real situation:

Actually, I’m into it now [politics]. I read the
newspaper and everything. I think a lot of these
guys out here are crooks. That’s what I think. I do
think everybody out here is out to get theirs, to take
care of their own. I see most of the people out here
in politics, they’re all crooks, they’re all corrupt—
cuz there’s no money out here, I mean everybody
wants to take all the money they can get. I think
everybody out here’s a bunch of crooks, that’s what

I think about politics out here.

Sam tapped into the important point that criminality whether in High or Low places is symptomatic of a simple thing: “There’s no money out here.” For the Kingdom, the increasingly marginalized national economy in the rising tide of capitalist globalization creates criminals across the board, whether in High or Low places. *When it gets down to the nitty-gritty,* Manu spells out, *It’s all about the money.*

The views of this young, up and coming generation of what one friend calls “hybrids”—anyone who had extensive experience living diasporically but who finds themselves living in Tonga—were generally unanimous, whether they were from the elite noble class or the dispossessed underclass: Politics in Tonga was “straight crooked”.

Talking politics with political actors—and we are all political actors—was one way to expose the lines that intersect social space and create meaning. Politics was a question I liked diving into and not only with deportees but with everyone I came across. I talked politics with everyone I could, from the privileged upper class cats from noble houses with close ties to the monarchy, cats who told me that to talk democracy was “heresy” in their family; to the educated elite, who gave me reason to believe that in order to gain social status in Tongan society one had to cow tow to the entrenched powers that be and get as many letters to back up one’s legitimacy, and even then you better get used to kneeling, eating shit, and giving those below you your own shit; to civil servants who struggled to reconcile the moral strain between the deep cultural imperatives of loyalty, faka’apa’apa (respect) and self-sacrifice with the progression towards an egalitarian, democratic and individualistic climate; and of course talking politics with one of the (in
my opinion) most dispossessed segments of the population—the deportees, who could also talk American culture and politics as well. As Taniela said, in the states he was more proud than sure of what it meant to be Tongan, and now that he was back in Tonga, he wasn’t so sure that he was proud of being Tongan. As Siua said very poetically, it was the Tongan value of love, or heart, that ensured our survival on the streets:

As Tongans, growin up somewhere [the States] that’s so much, and we so little, we gotta find a big heart. And as we find a big heart, Tongans get known. So we approach it that way. And every race in the States that knows our race, got respect. Because we come with so much heart that they gotta give respect. So we sit there, we meditate, we tryin to understand the visual imagination of the street. Come back to reality, now you have me, now you have people like me. And the only way to come up there as a poor person, its hard because you, as my race, only got a small percentage of our own kind trying to make it in this world, that gots the smarts for that world, cuz we only came from one place, and that one place only taught us one thing, that is to make it. But when we got there, as immigrants, we find different situations, and we all follow that. So what I follow doesn’t mean the other Tongan behind me follow. Its just what I learned. And what I learned was Tongans could do a lot, Tongans got much potential, Tongans got so much power in theyself to show, so much.53

53 Talanoa Session, 5/1/05.
Whereas in the States it seemed that the strong points of Faka Tonga that were distilled and kept sacred during the experience of diasporic survival—values of Unity and ‘Ofa Lahì (love)—those same values were somehow absent or missing amongst the Tongans in the homeland. In fact, seeing all the corruption and abuse of power and misinterpretation of Faka Tonga in the homeland was an assault on the imagined center, the same center that gave our lives survival and meaning in the Diaspora. Its in this point of intricate crossing that we can see that the deportees are carriers of uncommon rhythms—at the heart, they are carriers of a reversioned form of Faka Tonga, distilled in the streets and prisons of America. They still belong to the Root and have been banished from diasporic exile and brought home in shackles with lessons to teach the homeland what musn’t be forgotten: that it is ultimately our ‘Ofa and our Unity that sets us apart from the rest of the world, and that will ensure the survival of the inhabitants of this seemingly small, isolated island Kingdom in the sea.

*Would you go back if you could?*

Going back to the States was “technically” a possibility before 9-11, but since then it has been virtually unheard of due to the new and intense Homeland Security measures and general climate of hysteria and xenophobia in America. Many of the deportees were told by the INS that after five years they would be able to reapply. This hope, thwarted with 9-11, now leaves a bitterness in Manu’s mind: They tricked us: “Just sign this paper. After five years, you can just reapply.” See out here, see that’s a miracle, to go back to the states. Reapply? You know? *What the hell?* I went to Fiji: “Can I
reapply for a visa to go back to the States?" They ask you all this hysterical stuff, about your history, and then when you tell them the truth, oh, *they want your FBI records.*

In the final analysis for these men, the reality was simply: *you can't go home again.* They have been forcefully and permanently banished from the US.

Siua told me, “I’m learning from my lesson. I wish time could turn its hands, but I’m here now.” He had a peace and clarity about him when he said this, like the peace an old man would have, not someone in their early twenties, the peace of knowing through experience. Experience is the greatest teacher, and he was a patient learner.

Some suffer, some don’t. It’s as simple as that. They’ve accepted the fact that they can’t go home again. However, when it all comes down to it, most I talked with would only want to return to visit family, and especially to attend funerals, the points of termination, where the lines we love cross the veil and return to meet those who have gone before. Sam says,

I’m just focused being here. My mind is here...I think about over there, but that’s only like when funerals or stuff like that happen. But going back, I’m not focused on that. I’m just focused on being here in Tonga.

It was clear that not being able to attend funerals was the probably the harshest times for deportees. Lifelines that connect us to those we love—our family—are cut off by the

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deportation process, and these moments are the most difficult to deal with. Not being present to mourn the passing of our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, creates intense sorrow in a person’s soul.

Ed’s Putu, September 29th, 2005

You can create and adjust to a new life, improvise a new pattern, merge and reversion rhythms. You can survive, of course, that part is simple...but you can’t go home again...and this is difficult to imagine for most of us who have never experienced it. The shore you left is gone, forever. You are set sail on a course not of your own choosing, a course of exile. But like a true Navigator, you learn to survive. You become a vessel, as did Toa, who told me,
I know that without being here, my spirituality wouldn't be as strong as it was. If I was thrown back into Glendale, if I'd paroled back into Glendale, I don't know. I know I would've been changed, but I don't think so much change so soon.

Like Toa, or like any human being called to walk through tribulation, you look to the heavens; you tread the winepress and turn bitter water sweet, brewmasters of life. You live, you laugh, you love, and you write your story, leaving your children your lines in the rhythm to pick up and reversion again and again.

With all that being said, the question that remains is a moral one. Was the deportation of these men (and women)\(^{55}\) morally just? I don't have an answer, as I said in the beginning, the stories are what I was after. If anything, I hope these stories have captured your imagination and led your mind to search your heart, the true seat of knowledge. The words of Judge Learned Hand come back to me:

> However heinous his crimes, deportation is to him exile, a dreadful punishment abandoned by the common consent of all civilized peoples...That our reasonable efforts to rid ourselves of unassimilable immigrants should in execution be attended by such a cruel and barbarous result, would be a national reproach.

\(^{55}\) A small number of women have been deported. I only met one but did not interview her. However, word is that they assimilate into Tongan life with more ease, concealment and less overall hype than the men.
Regardless of the points of acceptance and peace they made, the reality remained clear, *you can't go home again*. I think T.S. Eliot was right: to know home, you must journey to a place that is not home, only then can you come back and truly say, *I know this place*. Caught in between two shores, Tonga and America, the deportees are uniquely positioned to know both places. To me, they are True Navigators like their Ancestors before them, they are posted in between. In a way they are our time and space travelers, our Warriors of Ta-Va.

I had many moments crystallize during my Talanoa Sessions with the deportees during my research. One of those moments came from Siua, and I think his poetic philosophy can sum up all of the too many lines I’ve written in this thesis. He simply said these three lines:

*It ain’t the end...*

*It ain’t the end...*

*Cuz we can still move.*

Lines that they are, these Oceanic Navigators set off from one point of origin to another point of destination. For them, despite all the reversioning and improvising into new diasporic rhythms, their journey seems to have made full circle back to where it began—Tonga. However, as Siua and our genealogy suggests, *it ain’t the end*. Because our lines converged from the same point many many nights ago, we know that lines do bend, and meet in marvelous ways. So, until the day we are ushered into Pulotu to meet those who have gone before, we will know that it aint the end, *cuz we can still move*. ∞
“Pando palma revelata prae cordia verus sedes mentis”

(The open palm reveals the heart is the true seat of the mind)
Any last words?” I ask the group of friends that has gathered around to see me off at the Fua’motu Airport. Their responses are varied. “Make sure you come back,” says one, “so we can continue the saga.” Another adds a tangent, “Want another shot?” Tangents are funny things; tangents are lines that touch but do not cross. Another says, “Next time you come, we’ll take you to ‘Eua.”. So whatever, words don’t mean much, there’s no such thing as lying in Tonga. But, when you hear a line of the
sort of truth that crosses your own line, you feel it. It brings life and rhythm to your own line. And because of this I’ll forever remember what Drow tells me, cuz it feels clear and true somehow, and only he could say it and have it leave such an impression on me too.

“Any last words Drow?” I ask as I train the camera on him. He simply responds, “We aint goin’ no place.” It slides off smooth and crosses towards me and in a moment I’m thrown into infinity again. We aint goin’ no place. Just posted, he would always say. So you wonder what happened to the deportees in Tonga? Its not a complicated thing.

Frankly, quite simply, they’re just posted: nodes, points of no displacement, receptive standing waves, emitting bandwidths of uncommon rhythms in the homeland. They’re not going any place. They’re living out their lives in Tonga. Just posted beings.

Its funny, cuz “posted” is street slang in America. But don’t let that fact fool you. Posted is a whole philosophy which is oriented to the constants in life: the skies above and the bodies moving in them, the sun, the stars and the planets, as well as the other organic bodies: clouds, animals, winds. When you’re posted you realize that space moves around you, not the other way around. When you’re posting, time ceases to be moved by space, and in this moment space travel just might be possible. Here, space is moved by the rhythm, by the ta, the beating. Here, space is moved around us, but we don’t move, we stay posted. Ta moves the va56. Like beating of bark into tapa or the beating of ink into skin. Life is over time. Just posted. Just posted is a way of being and a way of knowing, an epistemology, mastered by our Ancestors. A way of knowing, if

56 Ta is the Polynesian concept for rhythm/beating, a beating or demarcation of space, i.e. time. Va is the Polynesian concept for space. These concepts require expansion, at a later date. ‘Okusitino Mahina deals with these concepts in his work on Tongan time-space.
you will, of how a body enacts sensory being in space, or rather how a body \textit{calls forth} space.

The Ancestors knew this and felt it too. Indeed, this is the technology with which they worshipped and which in turn carried them across the deep blue. In ‘posting navigation’, islands come to you, not the other way around. \textit{Just posted}, we’ve been doing it for millennia, realizing that ours is a perspectival world. This is part of the dreaming, between body and space, and the dream comes into being when a being comes into it. This is the perspectival world of “posting”, a world which guarantees continuity and revelation in all things, a line through all disruptions. It is a way of being that \textit{survives}.

As my brother wrote me from the Utah prison complex known as the Point of the Mountain this week: “Pando palma revelata prae cordia verus sedes mentis”—“The open palm reveals the heart is the true seat of the mind.” Two years younger than me, but lifetimes wiser, my brother reminds me that life is to be lived in the here, in the now—this place, this moment. I am strengthened by his wisdom, distilled in a rare form in a place designed to kill the human spirit. His prose leaves me surrounded with a remanence of golden hue. He writes,

\begin{quote}
\textit{Realize that in maintaining an open hand you might not always like what you are given but you must make do and apply that constant and unconditional frequency of ‘ofa lahi. This is truth in practice and you need no other compass.}
\end{quote}
The compass he speaks of is the compass true Navigators live by, a compass that points us past the cardinal points of time and into the space of infinity, where lines cross and cross again in creative exchange.

T.S. Eliot writes, “there will be time for a thousand indecisions and revisions, time for you and time for me...”\(^57\) and leaves me pondering if all our revisions and indecisions will come to naught, destroy us with the constant grinding of time’s indelicate teeth—unless with open palm we direct our minds according to the compass of the heart.

So you wonder what happened to “the deportees”?

They have done as all true Navigators have always done they look to the heavens. Thus our story ends with the image of a Navigator, in a position of ever-watchful repose, flowing, in flux, just posted, eyes trained to the skies, an interpreter of signs and symbols, a patient brewmaster of life, heart as big as the ocean, soul as deep as the sea. My brothers. These Soul Navigators look to the heavens, for the shores behind them are no longer theirs... they stand squared in solemn stance, Apprenticed to the master building codes felt through our genealogy. They’re simply just posted, breathing nodes in the living map of genealogy, lines returned to the root. \(\infty\)

\(^{57}\) From *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock.*
THE END
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