Title
From Navigating the Seas to Navigating the Skies: Unloading Tongan Knowledge through the Undercurrents of Airline Employment in the Ano Māsima

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From Navigating the Seas to Navigating the Skies: Unloading Tongan Knowledge through the Undercurrents of Airline Employment in the Ano Māsima

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

‘Inoke Vea Hafoka

2021

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

From Navigating the Seas to Navigating the Skies:
Unloading Tongan Knowledge through the Undercurrents of Airline Employment in the Ano Māsima

by

‘Inoke Hafoka
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
University of California, Los Angeles, 2021
Professor Robert T. Teranishi, Chair

One of the main reasons for Tongans immigrating to the United States (U.S.) was to enter tertiary schooling and further one’s knowledge within colleges and universities (Hafoka, ‘Ulu‘ave & Hafoka, 2014). As this has been an aspiration for many Tongan people entering the U.S. for themselves and/or their posterity, another location of knowledge attainment and financial sustainability has become a prevalent force within the Tongan U.S. diasporic community, the airlines. The study takes place in the Ano Māsima, or known as the Salt Lake Valley, due to the influx of Tongans that reside in Utah compared to other parts of the U.S. (US Census Bureau, 2015; Empowering Pacific Islander Communities & Asian American Advancing Justice (EPIC & AAAJ), 2014; Davidson, 2011). The purpose of this study is to explore the

phenomenon of how Tongans in the U.S. utilize the airline industry to maintain connections to the sources of Tongan knowledge, which is people (our relationships), and place (where they reside, and our homelands). Also, to better understand reasoning of the influx of Tongans within the airline industry. Through the lenes of Tā-Vā and Critical Race Theories, the study revealed experience of air travel to fly around the world to learn and connect, gaining a sense of community and family nurtured within the workplace, and a form of knowledge production created through the undercurrents. The findings reveal content and resources to support marginalized communities (such as Tongans) through seeking to better engage with these groups beyond schooling and recognizing recommendations regarding the study (such as data disaggregation (mixed race), labor and school experiences, etc.).

This dissertation of ʻInoke Vea Hafoka is approved.

Ananda Marin

Daniel G. Solórzano

Tēvita O. Kaʻili

Robert T. Teranishi, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2021

DEDICATION

To my fanau – ʻAmalani Taʻaloga Hafoka, ʻInoke Filiksi Hafoka Jr., Mary Alisa Hafoka, and Mataumu Taufatofua Hafoka

To my ʻofaʻanga – Tali Alisa Hafoka

To my ongo mātuʻa – Ane Petiola Kinikini Hafoka and Filikisi Paea-ki-Vaiola Hafoka

To my ongo tokoua mo e tuofefine – Filikisi Paea Hafoka Jr., Tēvita Muli Hafoka, and Siokapesi Heilala Hafoka

To my ngaahi kui – ʻAmalani Taufatofua Kinikini and Tēvita Fanamaka Kinikini; Mele Tiulipe ʻAlofaki Hafoka and ʻInoke Vea Hafoka

To all my Tongan and Moana airline workers in the Ano Māsima

and to those that have prepared the way for me, to those that have been a part of this journey with me, and to those that will continue this work moving forward

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GLOSSARY

ako	to teach or to learn
anga lelei	tolerance, kindness
ʻapi	home
ʻapiako	school
ʻeiki	chiefs/nobles
Faaʻi kaveikoula	golden/fundamental Tongan values
fakaʻapaʻapa	respect
fakakata	humor, funny
fakaoli	causing amusement
fatongia	duties, responsibilities, or obligation
fonua	land
haʻa	clan
ʻilo	to know or to experience
kahoa	garland of flowers
kāinga	extended family or village
kele	sea sediment
kiddie	waist band
koloa	gift or gratitude
langi	sky
limu	seaweed
lototō	humility
māfana	warmth or exhilaration
malaʻevakapuna	airport
mamahi	hurt or pain
mamahiʻimeʻa	loyalty or commitment
mana	power or potency
mateuteu	prepare
mehikitanga	paternal aunt
melie	sweet
Moana	Oceania, Pacific Island(er)s
ngaahi talanoa	stories
ngatu	handmade and decorated bark cloth
ngāue	work
noa	balance
ʻofa	love
paki	paddles
poto	to be clever
puna	fly or jump
tā	time, to mark
tā sipinga	to set an example
tala	to story or to dialogue
talanoa	relationally mindful critical oratory
tapu	protective restrictions
taʻovala	waist mat

tauhi vā	nurturing sociospatial ties
tokanga	pay attention
tu‘a	commoners
vā	space
vahanoa	open sea
vahaope	cybernet or ocean space beyond boarders
vaka	canoe
vakapuna	airplane
vālelei	harmonious space
vāmama‘o	distant to one another
vāofi	near to one another
vātamaki	disharmonious space

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Tali Alisa Hafoka, I am thankful that you have been by my side throughout this academic journey, and you have been the individual that has pulled and pushed me along this path. Our daily conversations push me to critically think about ways that will enhance our family lifestyle, continue stay active in community work, and keep me mentally prepared when I must step into academic spaces to learn, teach/facilitate, and work. Your perspective of our family and your art allows me to pause and be mindful of the details. The attention and appreciation of the often-overlooked details are what sets a part a finished result from a memorable outcome. I am grateful for our children, ʻAmalani Taʻaloga Hafoka, ʻInoke Filikisi Hafoka Jr., Mary Alisa Hafoka and Mataumu Taufatofua Hafoka as they have made me a better man and father each day that passes. They are daily reminders of being and living in the moment, celebrating the wins (no matter how big or small), and constantly being okay with making mistakes because one day the mistakes will be no more.

To my grandparents, ʻAmalani Taufatofua Kinikini, Tevita Fanamaka Kinikini, Mele Tuilipe Alofaki Hafoka, and ʻInoke Vea Hafoka. You all took care of me for a good part of my childhood when my parents had to work. You all were my Tongan language teachers and the reason I had to take ESL (English as a Second Language) when I entered preschool, haha. I thank you all for that gift. To my parents Ane Petiola Kinikini Hafoka and Filikisi Paea-ki-Vaiola Hafoka, you both always supported me throughout my academic journey and never doubted my decision to continue school. Even when it got to the moment it became challenging to relate to the content I was engaging in, you both were very supportive. Mom and dad, I want to thank you both and acknowledge that no matter what life leads me to, resting on mom's

kaliloa as a child was my first educational experience. To my uncles, aunts, cousins, and relatives, thank you for always supporting and helping my family and me when needed, especially during the times I traveled back to Utah for work at the airlines or visited with the family from Los Angeles. I also would like to thank Tali's families, the Zukin's and Alisa/Toelupe's. You all have always cheered for the success of our family throughout this doctoral process. You all took me in and showed me the same love and respect you give to Tali. Ti and Nii Kinikini, you both have always made sure my schooling was on track, and I'm grateful to continue our connections through the Kinikini and Alisa/Toelupe families. ʻOku ou fakamālō atu Ti ʻi hoʻo tokoni mai ʻi he lea fakaTonga ʻi he taimi ne u fie maʻu ai.

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Dr. Robert Teranishi, I was not aware of the magnitude of entering into a doctoral program and the process of selecting advisees when I submitted my application to you and

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highly attended RAC, that I would need to figure out how to approach you to serve on my committee. You not only accepted my invitation to help on my committee, but you gave me an opportunity to be a part of the Center for Critical Race Studies in Education (CCRSE) at UCLA. Thank you for being an example of the type of scholar I'd like to strive to be. Through CCRSE and your RAC, I met even more scholars to navigate this doctoral process together and seek ways to prepare ourselves to enter academia post our doctoral studies; Brenda Lopez, Mary Senyonga, Cindy Raquel Escobedo, Magali Campos, Yadira Valencia, Dr. Tonia Guida, Dr. Tanya J. Gaxiola Serrano, Dr. Christine Vega, Dr. Luis Genaro Garcia, Dr. Yuen Hsieh, Dr. Bryant Partida, Dr. Christina Zavala, Dr. Channel McLewis, Dr. Stephanie Cariaga, Dr. Bianca N. Haro, Dr. Alma Itzé Flores, Dr. Michael W. Moses II, and Dr. Kathrine S. Cho. I learned much from these scholars by taking time to listen when they were willing to share their knowledge. Tēvita, ʻoku hounga ʻia kia kimautolu ʻae kau maʻu mataotao fakaʻatamai, ʻi he fonua muli koeni, ho toʻo fohe mo e ngaahi sipinga lelei. Our first meeting during the National Pacific American Leadership Institute (NAPALI) in Hawaiʻi, you told me if you could do anything to support me in my studies, let you know. I immediately, with some hesitation, asked if you'd be willing to serve on my dissertation committee? You, with no hesitation, responded, "I'd be honored to." I appreciate the work you've done and continually do to make visible Tongan (and the greater Moana) issues for all to be aware of.

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VITA

2019	Ph.D. Candidate in Social Science & Comparative Education University of California, Los Angeles – Los Angeles, CA
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PUBLICATIONS

Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

Fehoko, E., **Hafoka, 'I.** & Tecun, A. (2021). Holding tightly onto land and people during a pandemic: Kava pedagogies and tertiary learning relationships in vahaope. *Journal of global Indigeneity, 5*(1), 1-15.

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Soon-Ludes, J., Ajinkya, J., Teranishi, R., Le, A., Gutierrez, R. E., **Hafoka, ‘I.** & Gogue, D. T. (2020). *Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in higher education: A rural Pacific learning tour.* Washington, DC: Asian Pacific Islander Association Scholars.

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SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

Hafoka, ‘I. (2020, January). *Learning from the Undercommons to Create the Undercurrents for Pasifika Communities within the Airlines*. Paper presented within the session “We will get over it when it’s over: Race and Racism in Oceania” at the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania Conference. Hilo, HI.

Hafoka, ‘I. (2019, April). *Talanoa & Testimonio: Cross-cultural Conversations on the Power of Story*. Paper presented at the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies Conference. Albuquerque, NM.

Alcantar, C. M., Kim, V., **Hafoka, ‘I.** & Teranishi, R. T. (2017, November). *Space & Place at Minority Serving Community Colleges: The Geography of Campus Student Support for Asian American and Pacific Islander Students*. Paper presented at the Annual Conference for the Association for the Study of Higher Education. Houston, TX.

Hernandez, D., **Hafoka, ‘I.**, ‘Ulu‘ave, L. & Hafoka ‘Ulu‘ave, M. (2017, October). *Talanoa: Tongan Epistemology and Indigenous Research Method*. Paper presented at the American Indigenous Research Association Conference. Flathead Reservation (Pablo), MT.

Lopez, B., **Hafoka, ‘I.**, ‘Ulu‘ave, L., Kim, V. & Hsieh, Y. (2017, April). *The Silence of Our Friends: Recognizing Microaggressions*. Roundtable at the Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association Conference. San Diego, CA.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2021	Associate Instructor | HIST 3650/ETHNC 3651: Histories of the Pacific; ETHNC 2590: Pacific Islander American Experience The University of Utah – Salt Lake City, UT
2015-18	Associate Instructor | ETHNC 3990: Tongan American & Tongan Diaspora The University of Utah – Salt Lake City, UT
2014	Adjunct Instructor | BESC 107G: Multicultural Societies Utah Valley University – Orem, UT

CHAPTER 1: VĀHENGA ANO MĀSIMA

"How are you and your family able to travel around the world on a regular basis when we live in the same hood? Where do your parents work? How much schooling did they obtain to create travel opportunities?" These were perplexing personal questions for an urban Tongan American child growing up in Glendale (on the west side of Salt Lake City), seeing Tongan families and community members frequently fly to various cities across the United States (U.S.) and to the Moana[1]. Complex family obligations and financial instability often prevented travel especially by air, thus it was difficult to grasp how these Tongan kāinga (*extended family/village*) and community members could fly so frequently. The answer is that they worked in the airline industry. Depending on the airline, workers may have the benefit to travel at no cost or at a very discounted rate. This benefit could also be extended to parents, a travel companion (e.g., spouse, partner, friend), and dependents. Much of the travel done by airline employees and their traveling beneficiaries is on standby, meaning if there are available seats after confirmed/ticketed passengers have boarded, standby passengers were then allowed on board through the airline's policy/procedure. Tongans that work in the airline industry have given themselves and their families the opportunity to travel to various destinations while fulfilling familial obligations, staying connected to family and community, and continue to provide and earn a steady flow of income to maintain a modest lifestyle. This option seems to have become a popular one next to gaining access and pursuing opportunities through schooling.

[1] An Indigenous term used to refer to the South Pacific or Pacific Islands. Oceania and Pasifika are other terms that are known to be used synonymously to Moana (Tecun, Reeves & Wolfgramm, 2020; Kaʻili, 2017; Māhina, 2010). In the U.S., Pacific Islanders or Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) are the terms that are used to describe people of the Moana (Hafoka, Vaughn, Aina & Alcantar, 2020).

Tertiary[2] education has long been recognized through research and policy as a gateway to greater social and economic mobility in U.S. society (Tuck, 2012). Access to tertiary education was and remains one of the main aspirations of Tongans arriving in the U.S. (Hafoka, ʻUluʻave, Hafoka, 2014; ʻOtukolo Saltiban, 2012). Studies emphasize the importance of a college going culture in schools to promote a higher college-going rate, in order to increase the number of students who attend college right after high school, which is especially important for low-income, first-generation students (Tuck, 2012). Furthering one's educational journey within tertiary schools continues to be an important life decision for Tongans, but how do marginalized communities (with a focus on Tongans) make sense of these societal expectations relative to other ways they define, navigate, and pursue opportunities (such as finding employment within the airline industry)?

Moana peoples were some of the greatest navigators and voyagers in the world. Moana nui (*Pacific Ocean*) was the 'highway' on which navigation occurred from one generation to the next. As a highly mobile Indigenous people, traveling/voyaging/mobility has been a major part of Tonga's legacy and a form of knowledge production (Howe, 2014). Although there was a time period in Tonga (as well as numerous other areas in the Moana) where voyaging had slowed down due to the influence of Christianity and Colonialism (Grayzel, 2019; ʻAhio, 2007), Tongans still continue to make navigation relevant in their lives.

Western societies and knowledge systems excludes knowledge of racialized Indigenous people, while also reinforcing their fungibility in society, which should be at the forefront of educators interested in teaching for equity, justice, and critical consciousness (Juárez & Pierce, 2017). Despite the racial and colonial violence of modern schooling, meaningful learning

[2] Tertiary education or schooling will be used throughout the study in place of Higher Education. This is used to not distinguish a certain form of knowledge production, exchange and learning as 'higher' than other spaces.

relationships can still take place in the undercommons phenomenon in education. In a talanoa with Daniel Hernandez (2019a), we discussed Moten and Harney's (2013) 'undercommons' concept and how this could be framed and expressed withing a Moana context as an 'undercurrent'. This means that the undercurrent transcends the walls of college and university institutions to sustain and create knowledge that is relevant for oppressed communities through relationships that are forged between subversive intellectual. Tongans in the U.S., when disaggregated by race (Pacific Islanders) have a very low college graduation rate at 13 percent (Pacific Islanders are at 18 percent), compared to the national rate of 28 percent (Empowering Pacific Islander Communities [EPIC] & Asian Americans Advancing Justice [AAAJ], 2014). As Tongans graduate from high school in the U.S., tertiary schooling is a challenging space to gain access. Thus, Tongans have had to rely on and follow more pragmatic pathways after high school that were given to them by their parents/grandparents such as through airline employment. This has led to an influx of Tongans continuing to find work within the airline industry. The airlines have provided a practical and accessible space to fulfill multiple intelligences of relationships, travel experience, while surviving materially in a country where cost of living continues to increase (Gardner & Hatch, 1989).

Tongans in the U.S. are primarily found in the western states, arriving in the 1950s and in small waves during the 1960s (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019; Hansen, 2004). California and Utah are home to over half of the U.S. Tongan population (66.7 percent), while Hawai'i, Washington, Arizona, Texas, and Nevada combined have 23.8 percent of Tongan residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). During the late 1970s to early 1980s, American Airlines moved their headquarters from New York City, New York to Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas. Coupled with low cost of living and a need for workers at American Airlines' new home, many Tongans in the U.S.

made their way to Texas and settled in Euless, a suburb of Dallas (Goodwyn, 2008). When considering the largest airports in relation to enplanements, the number of passengers that board aircrafts, along the west of the U.S. (Los Angeles, Dallas-Fort Worth, San Francisco, Seattle, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, San Diego, Honolulu), there appears to be a correlation as to major airports being near areas of settlement for Tongans in the U.S.

Salt Lake City is home to the largest population of Tongans of any U.S. city, and neighboring city, West Valley City, has the second-largest population of Tongans of any U.S. city (EPIC & AAAJ, 2014). In 2011, it was noted that 1 in every 4 Tongans living in the U.S. resided in Utah (Davidson, 2011). Both Salt Lake City and West Valley City are part of the county Ano Māsima (*Salt Lake*) - nearly 1.1 percent of the population in the Ano Māsima (N=11,784) is Tongan (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Ano Māsima is how Tongans have come to relate to place based on the colonial name Salt Lake because, currently, there is no popular knowledge of local Indigenous names for the Greater Salt Lake area. Similar to the Tongan airline workers that work in Dallas-Fort Worth, the Salt Lake International Airport also has many Tongans that are employed there. I have decided to explore a department within one of the major U.S. based airlines in the Vāhenga Ano Māsima (*hub/base/station of Salt Lake*). Hernandez (2019b) articulates this notion of a transported ethnoscape, which he seems to describe and bring an essence of vāhenga as not just a hub/base/station, but (in this situation) Tongan knowledge that is transported and woven itself into the physical hub/base/station. Within this department alone during the Summer of 2019 (which had 900+ employees), more than 23 percent of the workforce was Tongan (and this did not include other Moana peoples in the department). Due to the dense population of Tongans in the Ano Māsima, and the unique phenomenon that has brought so many Tongans to a landlocked location away from the Moana, this site was a prime

location to conduct my research on the undercurrents of the vā (*space*) in which Tongans produce/share knowledge.

PURPOSE OF STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of how Tongans in the U.S. utilize the airline industry to maintain connections to the sources of Tongan knowledge, which is people (our relationships), and place (where they reside, and our homelands). My focus was located within a department of a major U.S. based airline located in Salt Lake City, Utah and with Tongan airline employees. I explored how Tongan airline employees in my research site have used their work benefits of flying and how they arrange communal relations in work as: 1) a space of knowledge production, 2) a site that that facilitates performing good temporal and socio-spatial relationships, and 3) a practical avenue of material security.

The study explored the following research questions:

1. How are Tongans navigating skyspace through the airline industry to gain learning opportunities?
2. What are the subversive 'undercurrents' (educational networks) found, created, and utilized by Tongans in the airline industry?
3. How do Tongans understand the workplace/airlines as an alternative learning space?

I conceptualized this research through the lenses of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Tā-Vā (Tongan *time/space*) Theory. I will use CRT to help explain how Moana/Pacific Islanders (Tongans being an ethnic group) have been racialized in the U.S. I draw on principles of CRT to validate participants' experiential knowledge, bring focus to the ways in which the Tongan community are creating lifeworlds within the airlines, and challenge dominant norms and expectations that Tongans in the U.S. may not align with, but bring significance to enhance their

own experience and possibly those that build relations with Tongans. Lastly, I will use CRT as a tool to help deconstruct forms of (internalized) racism that Tongans experience and are aware of or unknowingly accepted as a part of their reality that is expected to just be dealt with. In a later chapter, I will investigate the tenants of CRT in more depth to then illustrate which tenants are applicable to this study. That chapter will also allow me to give a more thorough understanding of how I will use CRT within this study.

Tā-Vā Theory will help contextualize this study through Tongan philosophy (Māhina, 1992; Māhina, 2008; Ka‘ili, 2005; Burroughs & Ka‘ili, 2015). Tā-Vā will bring on a temporal and spatial component that will help bring context of ways in which Tongans in the U.S. are navigating life through the connections with the airlines. Tā-Vā will also allow for perspective on how Tongans view time, but also how Tongans move in and out of spaces created for and by Tongans and spaces not necessarily meant for Tongans to exist in. Tā-Vā Theory is a framework that I use to help structure this study and give perspective of the significance of Tongans working in the airlines.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

Within the U.S., it is rare to find any tertiary institutions teaching or engaging in materials, histories, and knowledge surrounding the Moana peoples and places (Pacific Island Studies). The Moana is very diverse that it becomes very challenging to gain unique insights of the various ethnic groups that exist within this region of the world because the groups are considered too small of a population to be considered significant to engage with and, in the U.S., the aggregation of the Moana with the Asian population. This is very similar to the Indigenous peoples in the U.S. (American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians) as “they are often misunderstood or forgotten today due in part to their relatively small numbers and the history

and continued reality of colonization in the U.S." (Reyes & Shotton, 2018). As I have battled with this reality, I see this study pulling and pushing on this narrative to give room for better focus on the Moana and her various groups. As I think of Indigenous studies, focusing on a group, such as Tongans, and recognizing that Tonga has not been colonized (but clearly has been influenced by colonization) brings in more nuance to appreciate how Tonga has kept her independence. However, it also brings forth critique to ways in which Tonga has succumb to the globalized standards that may not continue to place Tongan values in the forefront. This study will particularly focus on an aspect of the Tongan reality in the U.S. diaspora (education and labor) that will add onto other the contributions of Tongan and Moana peoples to the global society, such as mobility (knowledge beyond land, sea people) and language (example: tatau [tattoo] and tapu [taboo]). Also, this study may add onto the foundation of a possible Tongan Studies in the future.

The Tongan presence in the U.S. is relatively new, so a significant part of my research is that I draw on Tongan knowledge (such as Tā-Vā) to understand workplace experiences and how work can be a place for engaging with Indigenous knowledge. So, it is groundbreaking and reveals wide gaps in knowledge. As one moves away from Blue Continent[3], the people in this region of the world, which includes Tongans, becomes clumped into groups/categories. Moana is the term I use to describe the people and the region of the Blue Continent, but due to sociopolitical purposes, I will also engage with the U.S. terminology to allow for nuances and understanding. Terms that include the Moana peoples in the U.S. are Pacific Islanders (PIs) and Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPIs). Moana peoples are also clumped in a larger

[3] Also referred to as the Blue Pacific, this region is known as the world's largest oceanic continent made up of a grouping of Pacific Island countries and territories by the Pacific Islands Forum (Kava Bowl Media, 2020).

aggregated racial category termed as Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI). Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are the second fastest growing population in the U.S. behind Asian Americans (Hafoka et al, 2020; AAAJ, 2016), which demonstrates an urgency to better understand the NHPI community. Tongans are a subgroup (or an ethnic group) within the NHPI category. There is still a lack of research that surrounds the NHPI racial group, but it is even more rare to find literature on any of its ethnic groups such as Tongans. It has been frustrating and an emotionally draining process to search and search for information related to my interests in academic spaces and literature, occasionally stumbling across any literature broadly connected to my ethnic and racial identity as a Tongan. Rarely seeing anyone who looked like me or was like me made it challenging because it was difficult to have someone be familiar or recognize my lived experience to feel validated, secure, and more willing to participate. Then, coming to the realization that I was not meant to be where I am by the dominant schooling system within western society because I was nowhere to be found, and recognizing that the knowledge I have been looking for meant I had to look outside educational institutions and within the undercurrents. This study allows to recognize the need to further understand the Tongan experience in the U.S. By focusing on a specific group within the NHPI racial category (Tongans), there is a power of understanding diverse developmental pathways. This study speaks back to common pipeline metaphors about educational trajectories by moving into spaces outside of tertiary schooling, such as the workplace (and in this case, the airlines).

As an airline employee for the past 10 years (and counting), many of my co-workers are Tongan and have kept close tabs on my progress in school. I remember mentioning to them some of my challenges related to the lack of Tongans (and more broadly Moana peoples) I had the chance to connect with in school. One of my co-workers interrupted me and jokingly said,

"Toko[4], it's because we're all here in the airlines. Look around the break room." On another occasion, another one of my Tongan co-workers loudly stated during a break from work, "if my kids don't make it to college or the pros (professional sports), I'm going to make sure they get a job with me here in the airline". Amongst the Tongans that work with me, I've noticed a variety of family connections - siblings working together, parents working with their kids, spouses covering for one another's shifts, cousins helping one another getting hired, and uncles and aunties working alongside their nieces and/or nephews.

In the U.S., mainstream ideals for success are facilitated by completing tertiary education. Culturally, tertiary education is a gateway to a lifestyle and community that epitomizes the American Dream. If Tongans are not achieving or aspiring to this otherwise seemingly standard goal (especially since attaining tertiary education was one of the reasons Tongans came to the U.S.), one begs to question if the American Dream is also the Tongan American Dream? If it is, how and when did it become so, and at what cost? And if it is not, what is their dream? How is it different and how is it the same? This research is intended to highlight a way in which U.S. diasporic Tongans navigate and make sense of life through our connections with the airlines. It will help give context of Tongan knowledge production that may help inform other entities within the U.S. how to better serve the Tongan community, and how Tongan knowledge can be beneficial beyond the Tongan community.

[4] Toko is short for tokoua in Tongan. This is a gendered term that allows for a sister to refer to her sister as tokoua, and a brother to refer to his brother as tokoua. A sister would not call her brother this term and vice versa. A sister would call her brother tuonga'ane, and a brother would refer to his sister as tuofefine. Today, toko is used as a slang or an informal way of referring to a close friend and family (while still following the same gendered guidelines for siblings). Similar to the informal use in English for brother and sister, 'bro' and 'sis'.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

After unloading over 170 pieces of luggage (average is about 70-120 pieces) and thousands of pounds of freight and mail from an inbound aircraft with a few of my co-workers, I quickly laid on my back in the bin of the vakapuna (*airplane*) to rest. In Tongan, vaka[5] translates to *canoe* and puna translates to *fly*. When the two words are combined, vakapuna literally is translated to *flying canoe*. While still resting in the bin of the vakapuna, I remember peeking out of the bin door and seeing other aircrafts parked around the airport at different gates. There are approximately 370 scheduled commercial departures from the Salt Lake International Airport every day. I imagined what the sight of numerous vaka anchored in the ocean might have been like during the time of sea navigation in Tonga.

Navigation is not a new concept for seafaring people. It is an Indigenous concept that is used not only for traveling or traversing sea, land, or sky, but is also used by many Moana scholars to conceptualize contemporary mobility through different systems such as school, work, society, etc. (Grayzel, 2019; Si‘ilata, Samu & Siteine, 2018; Ka‘ili, 2017a; Lavaka, 2014; Palaita, 2015; Uperesa, 2014). The beginning of this literature review contextualizes Tongans and their relation to navigation in this research. Navigation has significantly transformed from its original inception in Oceania, due to Christianity, imperialism, and colonization, however it remains a powerful and relevant concept for Tongans today.

The literature review continues to contextualize how Pacific Islanders (the racial categorization in which Tongans are an ethnic group of) are situated in the United States. The

[5] In Indigenous Tongan spirituality, animals, fishes, plants, birds, are called vaka (which means *vessels, mediums, avatars*) for our deified ancestors to travel from Pulotu (ancestral world) to Maama (earthly-mortal world). This points to vaka as a deep philosophical concept in the highly mobile culture of Tonga. Ancestors, like their descendants, are always traveling on vaka (Ka‘ili, 2019).

ideology and divisions of power based on race has been embedded within the core of the U.S. since it proclaimed itself a nation through violent occupation on lands of local Indigenous peoples and exploited stolen African peoples as chattel slavery in these 'new' lands. Racial tensions, hate, and violence have plagued the U.S. for centuries (or seen as integral and necessary for its existence), and like many other groups, Pacific Islanders were not immune to being racialized as they became identified. Since there is little to no literature related to conceptions of race/ethnicity connected to Tongans in the U.S., the literature presented will highlight aspects of U.S. race relations related to Pacific Islanders more broadly and the ways in which they have had to navigate school and work. Although the literature will be based around U.S. Pacific Islanders, there will be enough context to help identify how Tongans have and continue to navigate the U.S. through schooling and work, and more specifically the airline industry.

TONGAN NAVIGATION

Me'etu'upaki (as taught by Kavapele in 1966) (Kaeppler, 1991, p. 351)

He 'oie 'oi e kama'u ka mau ke kau savoli mo tuiloloua
'I o e o nai valu e o nai valu ē
Fotu mai falike tolua e ia kase ie kase
He kau sa tū ūli e i e au e

In the beginning of Tongan cosmogony there was vahanoa (*the open sea*) (Ka'ili, 2017a). Tongan primordial ancestors, Limu (*Seaweed*) and Kele (*Sea Sediment*), emerged from vahanoa and traveled to the island of Pulotu (*ancestral homeland*). Even from the beginning of Tongan genealogy, navigation/travel/mobility was paramount. As time passed, "Tonga emerged as a powerful and unified maritime chiefdom that fought and traded with Samoans and Fijians, and also extended its military power, political control, and cultural influence on neighbouring islands" (Howe, 2014, p. 150). The tongiaki (*Tonga double canoe*) was estimated to carry a

range of 60 to 100 people on board and had the capability to be at sea for a long time. However, due to the difficulty of handling the tongiaki during bad weather, a new vaka was created, the kalia. The kalia was faster, estimated to carry up to 150 people, and became the "new workhorse of Tonga's maritime chiefdom" (Howe, 2014, p. 152). One of the differences of the tongiaki compared to the kalia could be examined during a round trip voyage from Tonga to Fiji. The tongiaki would easily be able sail towards Fiji but would have to wait for some time before it was safe to sail back to Tonga. This was not the case for the kalia. Due to the new vaka design that was inspired by Micronesian technology, the kalia had the capability to sail home from Fiji against the trade winds (Howe, 2014). This meant that the kalia did not have to wait for the trade winds to calm down, like the tongiaki, to sail back to Tonga.

Tonga is a remote archipelago, group of islands, in the Moana that makes up the nation state of the Kingdom of Tonga. In Tonga, only Tongatapu and Vava'u are makatea islands, meaning they are made of coral uplift (limestone) that form the islands with fertile soils, compared to the other 160 or so islands that are sandy coral islets and atolls within the archipelago of Tonga (Howe, 2014). This meant that due to lack of forest area in Tonga, Tongans would have to sail to islands that had timber to continue to build and construct their kalia. The vesi hardwood was found in Fiji and was the main material used to build the kalia. As Tongans navigated away from their homelands in search for resources, this caused them to explore more of the Moana and create different vāhenga to live. This led to various social interactions with other island groups, the creation of trading cycles, weddings, religious connections, etc. This knowledge of navigation, ways of connecting and being were passed down intergenerationally through songs, dances, and performances.

Futa Helu, the late Tongan scholar, argued that through a cultural performance called the the Me‘etu‘upaki there was navigational knowledge encoded within this form of presentation (Hau‘ofa, 2008). The me‘etu‘upaki is a ritual performance that translates to s*tanding dance with paddles* and predates the disruption of voyaging that occurred with European contact (Kaeppler, 1991). The poetic lyrics of the different me‘etu‘upaki that are performed can be difficult to understand in a contemporary context, but they are performed to pay respect to the chiefs of old. Kaeppler (1991) shares, “Although I cannot give a satisfactory translation of the poetry, some of it seems to refer to canoes, directions, and island names...some of the movements of the paki (*paddles*) allude to poetry which deals with ocean voyaging” (p. 350). Although there is little knowledge in regard to the translations of the me‘etu‘upaki lyrics, it seems that this performance was not only for pure entertainment. I envision the me‘etu‘upaki as Futa Helu did. The me‘etu‘upaki may have been a non-written travel guideline/map that described different vessels and destinations traveled to in the form of music and dance. A unique form of navigational knowledge embedded within me‘etu‘upaki can point to ways that Tongans in the U.S. today are creating their own unique navigational practices.

Christianity

The European colonial project disrupted and changed the ontological and material reality across the Moana. The first Christian missionaries in Tonga arrived in 1797 (‘Ahio, 2007). Tongans did not readily accept their message and were more interested in the foreign material goods and possessions of the missionaries. However, in 1826 when the second Wesleyan Methodist Mission party arrived and established their mission home in Hihifo, a village located on the western part of Tongatapu, Tongans began to accept Christianity (Latukefu, 2014; ‘Ahio, 2007). At this time there was a young chief named Taufa‘āhau from a village in the Ha‘apai

region that would soon become the ruler of all of Haʻapai. After the death of Taufaʻāhau's friend, Finau ʻUlukalala (ruler of the Vavaʻu region), he took over leadership in Vavaʻu as well and then sought to be the ruler of all of Tonga. Taufaʻāhau departed through strategies of missionaries from tradition and began to reform Tongan politics, ideology, and culture when he accepted Christianity. The missionary effort was bolstered by Taufaʻāhau's conversion and when Tonga was conquered to become unified under his rule, it had become a Christian nation.

The Christianization of Tonga caused major changes. It was the symbolic face of change into western modernity as it formed the creation of the nation state. This also led to the creation of the constitution in 1875 and began to change the face of Tongan governance. Although Taufaʻāhau, also became known as King George Tupou I, converted to Christianity and came into power in Tonga, this shift was not readily accepted by everyone, and it caused a Civil War in 1837 (Daly, 2012). Many in Tonga pushed back against the way Tongans were being treated and pushed into a religion and belief system that was foreign. There was even support from the Methodist Mission residing in Tonga at the time, "supporting the Christian King George in his final suppression of his heathen enemies as he attempted to unite Tonga as a Christian kingdom" (Daly, 2012, p. 74). As Tonga became a Christian nation, this era has commonly been referred to and divided as pre-Christian and modern Tonga.

Currently, the involvement and practice of various Christian denominations within the Pacific is taken seriously and has, in many locations, become interwoven culturally and politically, unmistakably changing the cultural fabric of the region forever (Grayzel, 2019; Morris, 2015). The Pacific is argued to have overtaken the origins of Christianity in the 'west' and is now the most Christian part of the world (Forman, 1982). This era is marked by massive and rapid changes, including a loss of traditional navigation, transformation of communities

through dense settlements close to missionaries and sedentary life, and the establishment of schools. In Tonga, missionary or religious schooling started to overtake Indigenous spaces and forms of education. However, in the midst of all these changes, Indigenous knowledge strategically remained through cultural institutions such as the kaliloa (*laying on the forearm of one's mother to learn*) and tāno'a (*sitting in the kavabowl circle to learn from community and the elders*) (Smith, 2013; Tecun, Fehoko & Hafoka, 2021). Other spaces of learning in Tonga consisted of the falehanga (*women's weaving and tapa-making houses*), tōkanga (*men's plantations*), and falesiu (*fishing houses*) (Ka'ili, 2019).

Today, the participation amongst Christian religions (such as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) may give Pacific Islanders opportunities to access health care, business loans, upgrading of skills within a capitalist world, employment assistance, and education (Morris, 2015). According to the The World Factbook, 18.6 percent of the Tongan population is said to belong to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Central Intelligence Agency, nd). However, according to the records of the church, Tonga has the largest number of membership per capita of any nation in the world at 63.51 percent (Hunter, nd). This high percentage of Tongans connected to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can be the correlation as to why there is a large population of Tongans that reside in the Ano Māsima because that is where the headquarters of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is located (Britsch, 1986).

LOST IN A SEA OF RACE

The literature review provided in this section will center on the racialization of Pacific Islanders to demonstrate how they are situated within the U.S. context. The beginning of this section will, 1) focus on U.S. colonization and imperialism within the Pacific to recognize

(im)migration relationships in the United States, 2) discuss the violent role of race in the United States, and 3) the categorization of how Tongans are (in)visible within U.S. literature on race/ethnicity.

U.S. Colonization & Imperialism

> "Fanon, according to Moten, wants not the end of colonialism but the end of the standpoint from which colonialism makes sense" (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 8).

Fanon (1968) demonstrates how colonization was not just about land, but also played a large role in the creation of the racial project. The legacy of European colonization and imperialism that has taken place in the Pacific region has caused forced and ongoing relationships with colonial powers. The U.S. has created distinct connections with Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders – U.S. Citizens, U.S. Nationals, Compact of Free Association Migrants [COFA], and Immigrants (EPIC & AAAJ, 2014).

Table 1
U.S. Immigration Status by Pacific Island of Birth

U.S. Status	Regions	Rights and/or Restrictions
U.S. Citizens	Guam, Hawai‘i (U.S. State), & Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands	Live & work in U.S. legally, qualify for public benefits, vote, eligible to serve in military
U.S. Nationals	American Samoa	Live & work in U.S. legally, qualify for most federal benefits (some state and local benefits), cannot vote when living in states, eligible to serve in military
Compact of Free Association Migrants (COFA)	Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, & Republic of Palau	Live & work in U.S. legally, labeled “nonimmigrants” but are not considered citizens or nationals, not eligible for most federal benefits (some states may provide limited benefits), eligible to serve in military
Immigrants	Tonga, Fiji, Tokelau, Kiribati, and others	Not citizens or nationals, must apply for permanent resident status to live & work in U.S., must wait 5 years to apply for public benefits, cannot vote or serve in military

(EPIC & AAAJ, 2014)

The unique status that each of these areas historically have with the U.S. demonstrates the complexity of experiences NHPIs navigate to gain access to academic, occupational, and governmental support. Tongans are one of many ethnic groups from the Pacific that don't have any direct political relations with the United States. When immigrating to the U.S., Tongans have found it more challenging to gain access and support to resources compared to NHPIs that are already U.S. citizens, nationals, or have COFA status because one's birthplace in the Pacific. Immigration status coupled with how Tongans are racialized in the U.S. has only intensified their experience in navigating a foreign system.

Race

The U.S. has a deep and troubling history and conception of race. Early on in U.S. history, race was a biological concept. In other words, it was understood that biology was the determining factor of one's racial identity. Since the nineteenth century, the concept of race has evolved from that of a biological and hereditary component of one's makeup to a social construct or set of socially imposed identifiers (Omi & Winant, 2012; Langer-Osuna & Nasir, 2016).

> …early research in psychology framed intelligence as biological, hereditary, and measurable by IQ tests used to compare the (naturalized) intelligence of non-European American and European American children. Social scientists attributed the typically lower scores of non-European children to natural, hereditary differences in intelligence. This interpretation both naturalized differences among races and ethnicities and supported arguments for the inherent intellectual superiority of European children (Langer-Osuna & Nasir, 2016, p. 725).

During the early years of the U.S., the racial category Black was given to persons of African descent who were enslaved. As this categorization was established as standard, the notions of race became known as the "color line" by Fredrick Douglass and was later built upon through the work of W.E.B. DuBois (Rothberg, 2001). To keep a certain hierarchical order in the U.S., race was used as a distinguisher that supported the maintenance of white supremacy through privilege

and power of whites over those that were non-white (McDermott & Samson, 2005). For years, Black and white were the dominant racial categories of the country. Jodi Byrd (2011) discusses the concept of 'Indianness' that Columbus imposed onto the people he encountered in the region of the Caribbean due to thinking he had reached India, and the lack of knowledge that there were two continents, the largest ocean in the world, and a sea of islands that existed between Europe and India. This concept of Indianness became an early racial category. As the U.S. has become more diverse, this complicated the Black and white narrative as more racial categories have been constructed, transformed, destroyed, and reformed through social, economic, and political forces. This process is known as racial formation (Omi & Winant, 2012). These constructs are perceived and experienced on infinite levels by both insiders and outsiders of racial groups, affecting every facet of life.

Asian American & Pacific Islander (AAPI)

Coloma (2006) investigates the history of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the U.S. and how immigration, citizenship, colonialism, and refugee status have impacted their racial formation (Omi & Winant, 2012). The AAPI racial category was a label imposed upon Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, but also a powerful tool they took upon themselves to unite in solidarity and to rally for greater political presence and strength. Admittedly, there is some logic to the clumping together of these racial groups. Their origins are geographically in the vicinity of one another and there is unquestionably some cultural overlapping in ancient ancestral customs. Also, the ethnic groups are small in population size that even when combined they still are considered a minority group. Combining small groups perhaps brings some visibility to the whole. However, there is an overwhelming downside. The diversity that exists within this pan-ethnic and racial group includes "…over 300 spoken languages, various socioeconomic statuses,

immigration history and shifts, culture, and religion" (Chaudhari, Chan & Ha, 2013, p. 8). More visibility for the whole comes at the cost of visibility and distinction to the many small parts that make up that whole. When these are not accessible, issues unique to a given group cannot be identified or addressed. To understand the diversity that exists within the AAPI spectrum, much work has been done to disaggregate the AAPI categorization to reveal disparities that exist within the various ethnic subgroups of this racial population (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education [CARE], 2010, 2011, 2013; Teranishi, Nguyen, & Alcantar, 2015; Chang, Nguyen, & Chandler, 2015; Chaudhari et al, 2013).

Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander (NHPI)

The complexities of race, beginning in the Pacific, became nuanced. There were time periods where Moana peoples (not necessarily related to their skin color) were told they were white by settlers imposing notions of their lineage being connected to the Aryan race. This was done so that white settlers could stake claims to Indigeneity and to vast parts of the Pacific (Arvin, 2019; Horne, 2007). Notions of Blackness that are particularly tied to western parts of Oceania are vital discussions to be had due to the anti-Blackness treatment that exists in the U.S., but also on the global scale (Arvin, 2019; Warren, 2019). Examples of anti-Blackness in the Pacific could be negative stereotypes perpetuated through media due to the lack of interaction with Blacks, notions of colorism (within communities and even families) and the internalized Western perceptions of beauty tied to be lighter skin, racism because one's skin color, and exclusion of not feeling enough of the multiple identities (specifically being Black) one embodies (Perez, 2020; Sharma, 2011). The Moana was divided up into three regions and given colonial terms that portrayed a sense of smallness and one relating to the appearance of the people. "Pacific Islanders represent island communities from Melanesia ("black islands"),

Micronesia ("tiny islands"), and Polynesia ("many islands"). Regardless of the colonizer or political status, all are considered Indigenous people and communities of Oceania, and should be referred to as such due to the genealogical, linguistic, and cultural connections between communities" (Hafoka et al, 2020). The notion that Melanesia was named 'black islands' due to the dark skin of the people inhabiting this region of the Oceania begins to show the outside influence of race upon the Moana people. What other ways has race played out for Moana peoples that have (im)migrated to the U.S.?

"Hawai'i's colonial and immigrant history, imported U.S. racist thinking, and Indigenous Hawaiian ideologies have shaped ideas of belonging and difference in which culture, race, and ancestry are intertwined" (Sharma, 2011). In the U.S., Pacific Islanders are also referred to as Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders (NHPI). It is important to note that the "Native" in Native Hawaiian signifies their Indigenous connection to the land occupied by the U.S., whereas Pacific Islanders are those that have come to arrive in the U.S. from the Moana regions (Hafoka et al, 2020; Thomas, Kana'iaupuni, Balutski, Freitas, 2012; Trask, 2000). Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders make up less than one percent of the U.S. population. The numbers in percentages seem insignificant, but that percentage translates to over 1.2 million people (Hixson, Hepler & Kim, 2012). Also, NHPIs have become the second fastest growing population in the U.S. behind Asian Americans (AAAJ, 2016; Museus, 2013). Some other important factors to consider about the Pacific Islander population are a higher-than-average percentage of military veterans, a general lack of accessibility to affordable and culturally appropriate health care, unique immigration challenges, a disproportionate number of the population being incarcerated, unique difficulties gaining access to institutions of tertiary education, and on top of that have low retention rates in those institutions (EPIC & AAAJ,

2014). Progress has been made in creating a body of research specifically focused on NHPIs, but much of that information is not as useful as it could be due to the fact that disaggregation of AAPIs in research is not common practice. This issue of aggregated data and the small population size combine to make NHPIs virtually invisible when it comes to research. Furthermore, NHPIs are relatively new to the U.S. with Hawai‘i attaining statehood almost 60 years ago and significant waves of Pacific Islanders emigrating afterwards (Barringer, Gardner & Levin, 1993). Only a few generations of NHPIs have lived in the U.S. and understandably that short timeframe has yielded a very limited amount of research and literature on this population. Other context to be considered for the lack of information could be the long distance of their geographical location, unless it has been for the beneficial use of military purposes. Also, the belittling of small island nation states because of the limited resources that are available to extract and exploit. Barringer et al (1993) stated that census data on Pacific Islanders was only first collected after the 1980 census. Issues that are theoretically part of the everyday experience of Pacific Islanders, some of which are devastating to their community and experience, are unfortunately often not at all on the radar of the mainstream consciousness. If work and research that benefit the NHPI population are going to move forward, it is going to have to be led by members of the NHPI community who can see and have experienced the issues firsthand.

NOT K-16, BUT K–WORKPLACE

The workplace will be an important space to understand in relation to Tongans here in the U.S. However, prior to Tongans moving into the workplace (especially the airlines), their experiences within schools will help recognize why the workplace has been a more common and/or accessible transition compared to tertiary schooling? There are related topics that connect with Tongan educational experiences. As Tonga became Christianized, there was also a shift

from kāinga and ha‘a (*clan*) based Tongan education to more Eurocentric based ‘formal’ schooling, during which Victorian and Christian based knowledge and discipline were introduced and became standard in the learning process (Benham, 2006). This transformed the ways in which Tongans (and more broadly Moana People) view themselves, their Indigenous culture, and their place in the world (Benham, 2006). The two primary reasons Tongans came to the U.S. are for education and for employment (Hafoka et al, 2013; ‘Otukolo Saltiban, 2012; Lee, 2003). Cathy Small stated that of Tongans who immigrated to the U.S. prior to 1965, 100 percent of those who attended high school received their diploma (‘Otukolo Saltiban, 2012). Two important points about Tongans in education can be deduced from this information. First, that receiving and completing school is important and of value for Tongans when first arriving in the U.S., and second, that Tongans have the intellectual capacity to undertake college education (Anae, Anderson, Benseman & Coxon, 2002; Lee, 2003). Another important fact is that Tongans have the highest PhD’s per capita (Māhina, 2007). However, despite the success in the past, this has not translated to Tongans in the U.S. being able to continue their schooling onto tertiary institutions. As shared in a previous chapter, Tongans in the U.S. have a very low college graduation rate at 13 percent, compared to the national rate of 28 percent (EPIC & AAAJ, 2014). This suggests that the institutions Tongan’s in the U.S. attended provided inadequate support for Tongan (and more broadly Pacific Islander) students to complete the necessary measures to gain acceptance into college (‘Otukolo Saltiban, 2012, Kalavite, 2010; Anae et al, 2002). Another important factor that is missing from Tongan students’ experience is the generational knowledge from exposure to tertiary education that helps students gain a desire to go to college (Anae et al, 2002). The lack of both institutional support and generational knowledge of tertiary schooling in

families afflicted Tongans early on has had a far-reaching impact on affected Tongans in the U.S. today.

As conventional access into tertiary schooling is limited for Tongans, athletic scholarships have become a highly visible access point that conflates its actual possible attainment. The notable presence of Pacific Islanders in sports (and specifically American football) can be traced back to the U.S. military presence in the Pacific. In 1890, the first football game on record with a Honolulu team was against sailors from the USS Charleston (Tengan & Markham, 2009). This idea grew into what would eventually become the more organized football "barefoot leagues" in Hawai‘i, and was the genesis of the "Polynesian Pipeline" that brought (and still brings) many Pacific Islanders to many U.S. collegiate athletic programs (Uperesa, 2014; Franks, 2009; Tengan & Markham, 2009). The recruitment of Pacific Islanders into the military and sports not only come through Hawai‘i, Guam, and American Samoa, but also from other Pacific nations with no U.S. ties (such as Tonga) are finding themselves in that athletic pipeline due to the focus of the physical abilities and not necessarily the intellectual capabilities (Uperesa, 2014; Hokuwhitu, 2003; Diaz, 2002).

There is very little information about the demographics of NHPIs, let alone Tongans, in collegiate sports (Morita, 2013). Participation in (as well as intentions for participation in) athletic programs, especially for men, should be considered when looking at the Pacific Islander experience in higher education. It is important to note that these particular students might sometimes be the most visible Pacific Islanders in institutions of tertiary education, but that their experience does not represent all Pacific Islander students.

Belinda ‘Otukolo Saltiban (2012) gives meaningful critique about Tongans finding their way into the workplace through her examination of the conditions, constraints, and relational

practices related to Tongan educational pathways. In response to a quote from Hingano's 1984 research on Utah teachers' view of Polynesian students being lured to money making than to pursuing education in college, 'Otukolo Saltiban writes, "This analysis helps to explain why teachers in the state of Utah might have low expectations and finite assumptions regarding the futures of certain students", she continues on by writing, "In other words, while Hingano supports his findings with teacher narratives about Polynesian students, his study did not create a space for them to respond, challenge, or critique the perspectives of the teachers and researcher who occupy spaces of power and privilege (and whose assumptions directly impact them)" (2012, pp. 25-26). 'Otukolo Saltiban's critical insight throughout her research on Tongan student experiences in schools demonstrates a level of push out and racist ideas of Tongans from opportunities to gain access and succeed in tertiary schooling and force Tongans into the workforce, such as the airlines. Another perspective can be seen in today's reality that schools require material debt and privilege where work is a necessity for survival in the present capitalist reality. Navigation may be shifting from an autonomous and self-determining practice/lifestyle to more of a dependency relationship through airlines that offer selective accessibility, yet more than appears available to Tongan communities. The workplace, and more specifically within the airline industry, has become a place where Tongans create knowledge despite exclusive inaccessibility of tertiary institutions, a space where generational knowledge is gathered and produced through higher demographic presence of Tongan kāinga in the space (Freire, 2014). Tēvita Ka'ili notes, "it is a part of earning resources to maintaining their *vā* (*social spaces*) with other Tongan peoples, especially kin members" ('Otukolo Saltiban, 2012, p. 26). This research responds to gaps in the literature of Tongans and tertiary schooling by acknowledging the rich

Tongan knowledge production that exists in other spaces such as the airlines where many Tongans are employed.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Tā-Vā is a Tongan theory about the arrangement of time and space and how rhythm is performed in place. The use of Tā-Vā, as part of this research, centers and privileges Tongan ways of knowing, being, seeing, and doing (‘Otukolo Saltiban, 2012). Time for Tongans is expressed in social rhythms that main relationships, which comes into conflict with dominant paradigms of time (Ka‘ili, 2017a; 2017b). Therefore, Tā-Vā Theory is critical of the western (white) arrangement of time and space even though it has yet to racially identify it as such.

White supremacy (that Critical Race Theory (CRT) challenges) is based on the assumption of social evolution and linear progress, which is a particular arrangement of time-space where Black and Brown folks are at the bottom of a racial hierarchy (e.g., IQ assumptions). In this section of my theoretical framework, I argue that Tāvāism and Critical Race Theory are useful in collaboration because of their potential for unpacking Tongan knowledge and diaspora social realities. I begin by giving a more in depth understanding of Tā-Vā Theory and to clarify the way Tā-Vā has been understood from a Tongan perspective. Also, there are examples of how Tā-Vā is used to help recognize the practical aspect of the theory. I then weave the use of CRT to demonstrate the ways race has influenced the experience and identity of Tongans in the U.S. diaspora.

Lastly, I begin to introduce the Undercurrents to explain its purpose to understand, in this study, ways in which Tongans learn together and socialize through a shared relational ethic and value system. Undercurrents are spaces where knowledge is shared and created, and may encompass tertiary schooling, but also recognize that learning and knowledge production can exist beyond these tertiary institutions.

TĀ-VĀ THEORY

> "That the past is ahead, in front of us, is a conception of time that helps us [Oceanians] retain our memories and be aware of its presence. What is behind us cannot be seen and is liable to be forgotten readily. What is ahead of us cannot be forgotten so readily or ignored, for it is in front of our minds' eyes, always reminding us of its presence. Since the past is alive in us, the dead are alive—we are our history" - 'Epeli Hau'ofa (Ka'ili, 2017b)

Hūfanga 'Okusitino Māhina introduced the theory of tā-vā (*time-space*) stating how ontologically tā-vā are the common medium of existence of all things, and epistemologically tā-vā are social constructs, deriving from their relative arrangement across cultures (Māhina, 2002). In other words, "all things exist within time and space" (Ka'ili, 2017a, p. 35) and "time and space are reshaped by people according to their various cultures" (Ka'ili, 2017b, p. 62). Tā in Tongan means *to beat, to mark, or to perform*. It is also described by Māhina as a *demarcation of time* (Ka'ili, 2017a). Tā "creates tempo, beat, pace, rhythm, and frequency...tā nafa (*the rhythmic beating of drums*) and tā sipinga (*setting examples*) are both process of marking time" (Ka'ili, 2017a, p. 25). Vā can be understood as *sociospatial connection*, *space in between*, and *space between two or more time markers* (Ka'ili, 2017a; Ka'ili, 2005). In Tongan, vā is a root word for many different forms of space, like vahaope (*cybernet/ocean space beyond borders*), vāmama'o (*spatially distant to one another*), and vāofi (*spatially near to one another*). Airports and the airline workplaces are other forms of spaces. However, the space between or the relational space between places (such as airports) are also important to Tongan education. In ocean travel, this space is known as vaha or vahanoa (*seascape/open sea between islands*) and in sky travel, this space is called vavā (*layers of skyscapes*) (Ka'ili, 2005). When considering Tā-Vā theory, time and space are inseparable, so when thinking of the different spaces previously shared, one must think of all the rhythms, paces, actions, and motions (tā) in these spaces.

The intersecting concepts of tā and vā can be a creative process of vālelei (*harmonious and beautiful social space between people*) or vātamaki (*disharmonious social space between people*). While working at the airlines in the Ano Masima, the constant loud slamming of a plastic object on a breakroom table signifies Tongans are playing dominoes. This beating sound attracts other Tongan co-workers to a specific space in the breakroom to either wait in line to challenge the winner, spectate, talanoa, and connect with others around the table. This performance in an airline breakroom is an example of tā-vā. The constant slamming of dominoes is a demarcation of time that brings people together into a space to potentially tauhi vā (*nurturing sociospatial ties, maintaining beautiful social relations*), and the conversation/dialogue (or talanoa) that are happening is a form of demarcating/inscribing space with stories (tā) that can maintain (dis)harmonious vā (Kaʻili, 2017a; Kaʻili, 2005; Thaman, 2008). Nāsili Vakaʻuta (2009) articulates his thoughts on tauhi vā as not just keeping and respecting one's relation or space, but the value is "a socio-spatial mechanism that requires every Tongan to maintain right relationships with, and respect for the spaces of, others" (p. 24). He continues to say that tauhi vā as a pre-Christian Tongan value is, "a value constructed by the ʻeiki (*chiefs/noble*) class, it serves as a reminder to the tuʻa (*commoners*) class of their fatongia (*duties, responsibilities*): to serve the ʻeiki in order to maintain right relationship with them. Otherwise, the tuʻa would jeopardize their own well-being" (Vakaʻuta, 2009, p. 24). The late Queen Salote Tupou III, a Tongan monarch that reigned for over 45 years and promoted Tongan language and culture through her leadership and artistry as a gifted composer was attributed for the widespread of the faaʻi kaveikoula (*golden or fundamental values*) which bind and hold together Tongan culture (Koloto, 2016). The four values that make up the faaʻi kaveikoula are fakaʻapaʻapa (*respect*), mamahiʻimeʻa (*sense of responsibility and commitment to the cause*), lolotō (*humility*) and tauhi

vā. In a modern Tongan society, Konai Helu Thaman (2008) shares the notion of tauhi vahaʻa as "to look after or protect the spaces between two or more persons or groups who are related to each other in some way" (p. 465). From nurturing space to protecting space should allow for relations to maintain a sense of harmony and minimizing conflicts with those involved, and this is all dependent on the context of the relationships that exist even beyond the relationships tied specifically to the ʻeiki class (examples of this could be extended family, how one is genealogically positioned with family members, kinship, age, sex, etc.) (Thaman, 2008).

From the motherland to the diaspora, it has become challenging as Tongans seek ways to tauhi vā within the boundaries and constructs of U.S. society. Kaʻili (2017a) discusses in great detail the importance of events within the Tongan community and the conflicts that exist because of work, "Worktime...is arranged according to an accelerated beating of time in space. Furthermore, because it is based on the beats of modern clock time, work-time does not always allow for the creation of harmonious and beautiful vā that are achieved through tauhi vā" (p. 13). However, the timing of many Tongans in the Ano Māsima working in the airlines makes it a unique sociospatial connection between the Tongan kāinga there. Kāinga working together is cultural. From the Tongan Haʻa (*clans*) that were assigned specific work in the past (e.g., Haʻa Nima Tapu (*clan of royal undertakers*), Haʻa Tufunga Foʻu Vaka (*clan of canoe builders*), etc.), a new haʻa is emerging in the airline industry – Haʻa Ngāue Malaʻevakapuna (*clan of airline workers*). Although modern forms of haʻa have formed primarily based on money and influence, that sense of kinship relationships seems to still be intact with the Haʻa Ngāue Malaʻevakapuna (Thaman, 2008). Worktime may cause for a disharmonious space due to not having the time off to be present during important/special events connected to one's family/kāinga, but the remedy in the airline is that the Tongan kāinga find ways to work for one another so other Tongans can

attend familial, cultural, and communal events. This happens because the kāinga or Ha‘a Mala‘evakapuna have continued to embody tauhi vā, even in the diaspora.

CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical Race Theory (CRT) exposes the racial inequality that exists in our modern society (Solórzano, 1998; 2013). According to Richard Delgado, a legal scholar, CRT first became noticed in the mid 1970s with Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman and their frustrations with the slow reaction in the U.S. regarding racial reform (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Within legal studies, a leftist movement that challenged the traditional legal scholarship and critique mainstream legal ideology was called Critical Legal Studies (CLS). From this movement, legal scholars of color recognized the CLS failed to include racism as a critique and CRT became an outgrowth and created its own separate entity (Ladson-Billings, 1998). As CRT has grown throughout the years, it has found its way into various disciplines outside of legal studies to critique specific nuances within these different fields. CRT is now found in the field of education (Brayboy, 2005; Yosso, Parker, Solórzano, & Lynn, 2004; Teranishi, 2002; Solórzano & Bernal, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). It is important to recognize the five tenets that is necessary when engaging with CRT as understood by those in the field of education:

1. CRT foregrounds race and racism and intersectionality by looking at how racism interacts with other forms
2. CRT challenges traditional research or dominant discourse
3. CRT views student of color’s experiences as strengths/validating experiential knowledge
4. CRT offers transformative solution to various discriminations by connecting academy with the community, practice with teaching – a commitment to social justice
5. CRT continues to expand its boundaries by using contextual, historical, and interdisciplinary perspectives to inform praxis (Solórzano, 2013, p. 56-57).

The first tenet of CRT focuses on the centrality of race. By placing race as a center point of the discussion, it forces people to think and examine how the systems of oppression are influenced by the notion of race. By acknowledging the influence of race, one can determine the

existence of institutional racism. With over 23 percent of Tongans working in the airlines where my research site will be, race and ethnicity are central to understanding their experience and knowledge making.

The second tenet of CRT challenges dominant ways of thinking and doing. Once racist policies and practices are identified, it is important to challenge these oppressive ideologies to stop them from being institutionalized and perpetuated in society. Microaggressions are "one form of systemic everyday racism used to keep those at the racial margins in their place" (Solórzano & Pérez Huber, 2012, p.1489). Critically reflecting and hearing other forms of microaggressions that people have experienced can be very challenging to speak back to. Dealing with microaggressions is a process for each person in finding ways to challenge these everyday conscious or unconscious acts. The third tenet of CRT validates a Person's of Color experience. Continuing with the process of microaggressions, a person that has been microaggressed is heard and listened to. Their lived experience through a microaggression is important to understand and learn from, no matter how they decided to respond (or not respond) to the aggressor.

"Critique of oppression and desire for social change" without any self-defeating behavior (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001, p. 319-320) refers to the fourth tenet of CRT, transformative solutions, and a commitment to social justice. Lastly, the fifth tenet of CRT, "approaching an examination of microaggressions from a CRT perspective means we engage an interdisciplinary analysis that centers the lived experiences of People of Color to understand how everyday racism, and other forms of oppression, intersect to mediate life experiences and outcomes" (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2014, p. 5).

As I continue to situate Tongans within the racial/ethnic demography of the U.S., CRT

becomes an important tool for research. By focusing on the issues related to Tongans, I can then begin to challenge dominant ideologies, and use experiential knowledge to speak back to mainstream norms. CRT also offers a way for Tongans to become visible through context, history, and various perspectives to validate the importance of Tongan knowledge and make relevant the Tongan experience within educational institutions.

The use of Tā-Vā and CRT are integral frameworks that help shape the thought process of this research. When considering tā and vā, one should be mindful of the temporospatial relationships. The moment Tongans arrived in the U.S. was a moment in time where many had to navigate new spaces and systems that were not designed with Tongans in mind. However, with tā and vā lenses, Tongans can be shown to have marked a new space in the diaspora. Racial identity caused Tongans in the U.S. to be invisible within the racial categorization of Pacific Islanders. CRT allows for critique of systems of oppression and how these systems require one to ponder where are Tongans situated within the U.S. and where are they not? If Tongans are visible and people are aware of our existence, it is typically through sports (specifically football). What happens when the reality of professional sports doesn't offer an opportunity for Tongans? Overall, Tā-Vā theory allows for recognizing the rhythms and patterns that create the undercurrents of Tongan participation within U.S. society, and CRT allows for critique on how the racialization of Pacific Islanders has caused Tongans to become laborers within the airline industry.

UNDERCURRENTS

To understand the undercurrents, it is vital to recognize the intellectual genealogy of how this term came to be, from the undercommons. The undercommons has become a concept, notion, a space where subversive intellectuals within tertiary institutions, such as colleges and

universities, go to because “work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong” (Moten & Harney, 2004, p. 102). The undercommons is a space that allows for knowledge creation that exists within a collective who seek to build relations extending beyond the responsibilities tied to tertiary institutions. These subversive intellectuals are typically those from oppressed communities that were never expected to exist within the common spaces of these tertiary institutions. Hence, subversive intellectuals are those that take from these common spaces into the undercommons to create movements of relational building and liberation.

As discussed in an earlier chapter, the undercurrent was inspired through a talanoa I had with Daniel Hernandez (2019a) (also known as Arcia Tecun) as we shared our thoughts and insights of Harney and Moten’s (2013) undercommons. We recognized that such spaces of transformation and liberation within the undercommons seem to, not only exist outside of schooling, but also in the community and beyond. In essence, undercommons are places where these subversive intellectuals gather outside of these institutional spaces that restrict the ability to relate and liberate. Fred Moten, during an interview, said, “If somebody’s reading our stuff, and they think they can get something out of the term ‘planning’ or ‘undercommons’ or ‘logistically,’ that’s great, but what matters is what they do with it; it’s where they take it in their own relations” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 106). Now, undercurrents are the currents that often go against or move in a direction different from that of the surface (mainstream) current. So, to add on to the work of the undercommons and bring relevance and a relational component to the Moana, the undercurrent is a Moana philosophical and relational connection to the Black radical tradition. An undercommons from the cultural standpoint of the Moana and Moana peoples with the nuances of Moana sensibilities. The undercurrents, like the undercommons, continue to

sustain and create knowledge that is relevant for oppressed communities through relationships that are forged between subversive intellectuals.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

> "The term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many Indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful" (Smith, 2013, p. 1).

Situating myself within the research is important to show transparency and demonstrate my fatongia (*responsibility/obligation*) to my Tongan kāinga as I begin this research with them. This chapter will begin with my positionality (Ko Au), followed by the concept of talanoa, an Indigenous Tongan research method and methodology, and its' role within this research. I continue to introduce how I engaged with digital talanoa through the medium of film. I will conclude the chapter by discussing where I conducted this research, with whom, and how I collected the knowledge and information that will be presented and analyzed in this project.

KO AU

> As affirmed by indigenous and non-indigenous scholars, self-reflection (or reflexivity) is necessary because it interprets how we have engaged not only in the thinking, but also in the doing. When we write our self-reflections linked to our engagements with indigenous knowledge that also include research methodologies, we should not write from or 'at a distance, instead [we] have to show the blisters on our hands' (Fa'avae, 2018a, p. 78).

Ko au (*I am*) born to Tongan immigrant parents. My mother is from 'Uiha, Ha'apai, Tonga and my father is from Faleloa, Ha'apai, Tonga. I was raised in Glendale, Salt Lake City, Utah, a working class, and culturally diverse neighborhood on the west side of the city. When I was young, I was fortunate to be cared for by both sets of my grandparents. While my parents worked, I learned from my grandparents who helped shape my identity (language and cultural values/practices). Throughout my life, I have attended, and continue to practice, Tongan religious congregations that are part of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS/Mormon). However, it is important to understand the nuances and challenges I confront as

a practicing member of this faith, and ‘Ulu‘ave-Hafoka (2017) beautifully describes these feelings and experiences:

> We, as the young, Mormon, and Tongan generation, have not been here for some time. But that has not meant that we no longer believed the faith tradition that our foremothers sacrificed so much for. We have always been comfortable with duality, multiplicity. To be young, Mormon, and Tongan can mean daily Book of Mormon reading in a concrete cell; tribal tattoos under white shirt and tie. To be young, Mormon, and Tongan can mean belief in Maui and Jesus; belief in the temples’ promises but never knowing if you’d receive them. To be young, Mormon, and Tongan means we did not lose our faith in anti-literature while studying at BYU-Provo. Those institutions did not even admit us unless our bodies could move from yard line to goal. To be young, Mormon, and Tongan means our faith has been separate and complicated… To be young, Mormon, and Tongan means we live on the margins of Mormondom (pp. 103-104).

Community functions that are connected to my Tongan heritage have also always been a large part of my life (e.g., weddings, birthdays, funerals, baptisms, forums, sporting events, reunions, etc.). Participating weekly in church and attending cultural events helps me maintain an understanding of the Tongan language and provides opportunities to tauhi vā with community members who are also of the LDS faith. I also have worked in the airline industry as part of the Vahenga Ano Māsima for over 10 years. I have been a customer service agent (checking in passengers, boarding and deplaning aircrafts, and helping passengers locate luggage if misplaced/mishandled) and I am currently, a ramp agent (loading/unloading aircrafts, and transporting luggage to the baggage carousel or connecting flight). Lastly, I am a husband, and a father of four. I work together with Tali Alisa Hafoka, who I am a husband to, to provide, support, protect, nurture, teach, and learn from my growing family, and my Tongan identity certainly touches each of these efforts.

All these layers and intersecting aspects that create my positionality provide me with the insight to do this research with my Tongan community working in the airlines. I can connect on many levels with the range of Tongans that will be a part of this research. I work with them, I’ve

interacted with them in and outside the workspace, I speak their language, I am a part of the community that many of them come from, and I am one of them. The relationship I have with many of the Tongans I work with began long before I was born. As Tongans made their way to the U.S., many came together and located areas where they could be with one another. These relationships have continued well beyond the initial gathering of Tongans in areas in the diaspora, but through time/generations. For example, I remember talking with a Tongan man while unloading and loading bags on a quick turnaround flight (meaning the aircraft arrived a little late and needed to quickly get back on its next route to maintain an on-time departure). The Tongan man already knew who I was and knew that I was named after my paternal grandfather. As soon as we finished unloading bags, we had a few minutes to talanoa and rest in the bin of the aircraft before the next wave of bags were sent up on the belt loader to stack and load. He began to describe how he and my father became friends, and he also shared experiences they had together before they both found their spouses and settled down into the married life. The relations built by this man and my father connected him to me. I hope that these relationally mindful connections continue with my children and their posterity. As a family, we live purposefully so that this will happen. I recognize the importance of this research as it will complexify the understanding of the diasporic Tongan experience, specifically in the U.S., and acknowledge that although Tongans have been pushed out and systematically excluded from tertiary schooling; Tongan culture and knowledge within the Tongan community is still thriving in various other spaces (such as the airlines). Knowledge and culture had been shared through oral practices in the past, and in many ways these practices continue on to today.

TALANOA

Sitiveni Halapua introduced talanoa within the political setting as a method to talk openly from the heart, and Timote Vaioleti developed it into a research methodology in education (Tecun, Hafoka, ʻUluʻave, ʻUluʻave-Hafoka, 2018; Faʻavae, Jones & Manuʻatu, 2016; Vaioleti, 2006). Vaioleti (2006) described how it was challenging to see Pacific peoples attempt to engage with foreign research methods (e.g., individualistic and extractive interviews, privileging of quantitative superficial data vs. in-depth qualitative data), which led him to introduce talanoa to academia. Talanoa has been defined by various Pacific scholars, as *unconcealed storytelling* by Halapua and Pago, *curious dialogue that is a social rather than individual phenomenon* by Kēpa and Manuʻatu, and *talking critically yet harmoniously* by Māhina (Tecun et al, 2018). These early definitions have led to more research using talanoa as a method to where Tecun et al (2018) defines talanoa as *relationally mindful critical oratory* (Tecun et al, 2018). Faʻavae (2018b) explains that talanoa requires a more intimate process that the researcher must reflect on and engage in while listening to people's stories and experiences, and that the focus is not merely to collect data, but on learning the knowledge that is shared. Included in what is learned in talanoa is relational knowledge such as appropriate ways to impart/use the results of co-produced knowledge in an appropriate and meaningful way. Talanoa does not pretend to be a sterile 'controlled' object driven collection of data, but rather an honest engagement with the complexity and sometimes messy realities of people and society. Talanoa is an ethical accountability that one is a subject engaging with other subjects, which is to say that one has agency as does one's interlocutor. This process of mediation is not free from each other's positional locations and standpoints, but rather an accountable integration of them. What one contributor shares informs the catalyst or limits of a respondent's contribution, which in turn does the same. The relational

mindful nature of talanoa is a process of actively relating positively and renewing meaningful relations, where relational is an omnipresent verb.

The role of relationships within talanoa is vital to where Vaioleti explains different types of Tongan specific talanoa (Fa‘avae et al, 2016):

- Talanoa vave (quick and surface verbal exchange between two or more people)
- Talanoa faikava (focused talanoa around similar interests while drinking kava)
- Talanoa usu (deep and more intimate which involves mālie, māfana, and humor)
- Talanoa fakafa‘ahikehe (sharing about supernatural visitation, dreams or visions)
- Talanoa faka‘eke‘eke (closest to a modern interview and involves verbal searching)
- Pō talanoa (talking in everyday matters)
- Talanoa‘i (involves high level analysis, synthesis and evaluation)
- Tālanga (similar to debate or constructive argument about issues that require attention)

As researchers engage in talanoa, it is common to weave through the different types of talanoa during a talanoa session (moments or spaces where/when talanoa takes place). This displays that talanoa is not one-dimensional.

Vaioleti (2006) makes it clear that how researchers engage in talanoa is just as important as being a part of a talanoa. A researcher should understand the ‘ulungaanga faka-Tonga (*Tongan behavioral characteristics*), which are; faka‘apa‘apa (*respect*), anga lelei (*tolerance, kindness*), mateuteu (*preparedness, hard-work, professionalism*), poto he anga (*knowledge of what to do and doing it well*), and ‘ofa fe‘unga (*showing appropriate compassion, empathy, and love for the context*) (Fa‘avae et al, 2016; Vaioleti, 2006). As different types of talanoa exist and ‘ulungaanga faka-Tonga is important to embody, talanoa cannot thrive in prescriptions (e.g, do this, wear this, then do this, and then you have done talanoa). Tecun et al (2018) argue for theoretical understandings of talanoa to better gauge the spectrum of possibilities in producing knowledge that can be done with lots of preparation or in a spontaneous moment with no preparation. Specifically, because it is premised on relational mediations of *balance* (noa) where mana and tapu are calibrated. Mana being the *potency* or *energy* an individual has and tapu

(*protective restrictions*), which is the protection around one's mana. This is essentially the protocol, or the mindfulness, of relational potential in one's awareness of vā.

Tecun et al (2018) further identifies characteristics of talanoa. The word talanoa when broken up as a compound word means *to story/dialogue (*tala) and *balance, equilibrium, zero* (noa). So, to talanoa means "to story/dialogue in balance", or "to story/dialogue once there is balance", or "to story/dialogue in order to reach balance". This helps visualize the relational aspect of talanoa as it is a process of reaching Noa as well as the result of Noa (Tecun et al, 2018). If a researcher does not have intimate, close, or meaningful relations with participants and a lack of 'ulungaanga faka-Tonga, Noa may take time to reach causing a talanoa vave interaction. For example, recently there was a new Tongan hire at work who I knew of but had never met in person. I knew his family name and some members of his extended family. I also knew he had played collegiate football. He knew similar information about me. In my experience, this type of prior knowledge of another community member when meeting for the first time is not uncommon for Tongans. When we were finally able to introduce ourselves, our talanoa vave revealed many community connections including some first cousins that we have in common because my uncle is married to his aunt. The level of talanoa escalated as our conversation established that our connection goes back generations to Tonga and follows family immigration stories. We were not merely strangers who found something in common but fellow community members confirming a real connection to each other and to the community as a whole (Tecun, Reeves & Wolfgramm, 2020). Talanoa is this beautiful oratory that seeks out balance and nurtures the relationships of all those engaged with the process. But what happens if/when talanoa becomes digital?

Digital Talanoa

Benmayor (2012) writes that digital storytelling, "is a loose term used to define a variety of digital media products, some of which have little to do with storytelling in the more traditional sense" (p. 510). However, within education digital storytelling has become a hybrid, multimedia narrative form that allows for critical and creative theorizing (Benmayor, 2012). Digital storytelling has given opportunities for people to discuss and share their social identities, positionalities, and inequalities in a compelling way (Benmayor, 2012). Lana Lopesi (2018) gives various examples of a form of storytelling, relating and connecting through digital spaces. She argues that through technology, Moana peoples are finding ways to unify rather than uphold the false divides in Oceania created by colonialism and imperialism. Lopesi (2018) brings up digital social platforms beginning in the 1990s to present day such as The Kava Bowl, Poly Café, Bebo, Myspace, Twitter, etc. Those early platforms were some of the early stages of introducing talanoa into the digital vā. Facebook for Tongans (in the motherland and in the diaspora) has attracted the attention of not only youth and young adults during its introduction in the mid 2000s, but has gained more traction with the older generations (Burroughs & Ka'ili, 2015). Facebook has unintendedly created a digital diaspora, a space where geographical barriers are diminished and has become a portable homeland, to bring on the need of digital riturals which "challenge and reinforce traditional power relations within diasporic communities" (Burroughs & Ka'ili, 2015, p. 2). As different forms of digital storytelling become more specialized (e.g., digital testimonio (Benmayor, 2012; Bernal, Burciaga & Carmona, 2012), and as Moana communities continue to engage more with technology, digital talanoa has recently found a place in the literature (Schleser & Firestone, 2018; Meredith, 2018). The use of digital talanoa is primarily geared towards Pacific youth (Schleser & Firestone, 2018; Meredith, 2018). Schleser

and Firestone (2018) assisted youth by teaching them how to create film content by using their phones to create stories. Over the period of 24 hours, youth would use the skills and lessons taught to them (storytelling, storyboarding, filming, and editing) and then return to piece together their films with others. The youth that participated were asked to focus their films on health practices, which then lead researchers to understand the health trends of these Pacific youth in New Zealand.

Jackson Jr. (2014) argues that academia must give scholarly value to alternative forms of knowledge productions, and specifically forms often underappreciated by traditional academic gatekeepers. He continues by explaining in great detail the work of filmmakers and how filmmaking/videography can be connected to academic research that has the ability to reach scholarly and non-scholarly audiences. In thinking of the current use of digital talanoa, I am looking to engage in the practice slightly different. Rather than having participants use their phones to gather their own stories, I planned to film the different talanoa sessions that I engaged in with participants of the research. As I thought about my approach to digital talanoa, it was a must that it be relationally mindful, that it was a communal process, and that it was based on already established relationships. The participants and I would co-produce the digital talanoa together. The equipment planned to be used for the talanoa sessions include cameras, microphones, tripods, and other necessary items needed to help create good quality footage and sound. However, since this research was done during the Coronavirus Disease, or COVID-19, pandemic, the process was altered a bit to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) safety precautions around the pandemic. These protocols included, social (or better terminology – physical) distancing, wearing masks in public areas, no touching of one's face in public, and thoroughly washing hands. It was important for me to properly prepare to give

participants the time to prepare themselves to be mentally ready and physically safe before the talanoa sessions, so that they would flow as smoothly as possible. I spent the time with participants to explain the process so they would be familiar with how the process of being a part of a talanoa session. My positionality was expressed and enabled trust with those that took part of the talanoa sessions.

PARTICIPANTS AND RESEARCH SITE

I conducted my research with Tongan ramp agents that work for a major U.S. based airline at the Salt Lake International Airport. As of the Summer of 2019, the department that the ramp belongs to within the U.S. based airline had over 900 employees and over 23 percent of them were of Tongan heritage. The Tongans that participated had to have worked as a ramp agent during the data collection process. Participants in this research would have to be able to trace their lineage and ancestry back to Tonga. Also, since the study is wanting to engage in Tongan knowledge production and experience within the airlines, personally, it was imperative that participants have worked within the airlines and on the ramp for at least 2 years. This would have allowed for sufficient time to (re)connect with other Tongans at work, feel confident to use their employee benefit of flying, and recognize their role and goals/aspirations (if any) within the airline. As a new employee on the ramp, full-time status is not given until one has good work seniority coupled with being in good standing with the airline company. Until there is a job opening, new employees work minimal hours and don't get much opportunity to meet their co-workers (unless they decide to pick up hours to work more). In terms of flying, one can argue that Tongans have normalized the experience of flying due to the decades of Tongans being employed in the airlines. However, learning the flight system and traveling by air may be new

experiences for some. This can cause delay on travel because of the lack of experience traveling by air, and not knowing what to do once one arrives in another unfamiliar location.

The research site was planned to be held and conducted either at the work site, my home, participants homes, a library, or a public park (wherever participants were comfortable meeting and being filmed). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, research could not be gathered through in person talanoa sessions as previously planned. The research site turned into a virtually one as the Zoom platform was used to host and record these talanoa sessions. Since participants and I were all in different locations, the guidelines were told to be followed depending on one's location. Most of the participants joined their talanoa session while at home, and only two participants decided to join their talanoa sessions while in their automobiles.

My initial intended number of participants for this research was 8-12 Tongan airline workers. However, the total ended up being 28 Tongan airline workers that participated in this research. There were 32 that accepted, but due to last minute emergencies, four were not able to participate. I also included myself in the research to bring the total to 29 Tongan airline workers.

Table 2
Capsule Summaries of Participants from the Talanoa Group Sessions

#	Participants	Years of Service	Capsule Profile	* Current Work Area
1	Samiuela Afu	6 years	(Tongan) Samiuela is a Ramp Agent. He has held a position as a Tow Team Break Rider. He has previously worked as a Cargo Agent. He has also worked at the SFO station. Samiuela's mother works in the airlines. He also has 1 sibling that works in the airlines, for another company.	Tow Team
2	Josephine Akoula	12 years	(Tongan) Josephine is a Manager on the Ramp. She has previously worked as a Ticketing and Gate Agent and also held leadership positions in that area.	Admin

			Josephine's uncle works in the airlines. She also has a brother-in-law works in the airlines, for another company.	
3	Alexander Fiefia	14 years	(Tongan) Alexander is a Ramp Agent. He has held positions as a Deice Pad Commander and Tow Team Break Rider. He also has volunteered for airline to direct and participate in sporting events and fundraisers. Alexander has 1 sibling, 2 uncles, and 7 cousins (3 first cousins and 4 second cousins) that work in the airlines. He also has 1 sister-in-law that works in the airlines, for another company.	Tow Team
4	June Fiefia	5 years	(Tongan) June is a Ramp Agent. He is currently certified as an Aircraft Load Agent. June has 1 sibling, 2 uncles, and 7 cousins (3 first cousins and 4 second cousins) that work in the airlines.	Ramp
5	'Inoke Hafoka	10 years	(Tongan) 'Inoke is a Ramp Agent. He has previously worked as a Ticketing and Gate Agent. 'Inoke's brother works in the airlines, for another company, and 8 cousins (2 first cousins and 6 second cousins) that work in the airlines.	Transfers
6	Rachael Haiola	7 years	(Tongan) Rachael is a Ramp Agent. She is currently certified as an Aircraft Lead Agent. Rachael's mother retired from the airlines, and she has many relatives that work in the airlines.	Ramp
7	Mateaki Heimuli	7 years	(Tongan) Mateaki is a Ramp Agent. Mateaki's spouse, 3 siblings, 1 uncle, 1 sister-in-law, 2 brothers-in-law, and 3 first cousins all work in the airlines. He also has 1 sibling that works in the airlines, for another company.	Ramp
8	Sefo Heimuli	6 years	(Tongan) Sefo is a Ramp Agent.	Ramp

			Sefo's spouse, 3 siblings, 1 uncle, 1 sister-in-law, 2 brothers-in-law, and 3 first cousins all work in the airlines. He also has 1 sibling that works in the airlines, for another company.	
9	Langi Hola	6 years	(Tongan) Langi is a Ramp Agent. Langi's dad worked in the airlines, for another company. He also has various cousins and uncles that work in the airlines.	Ramp
10	Sione Kinikini	17 years	(Tongan) Sione is a Ramp Agent. He has been certified as an Aircraft Load Agent, and he has held positions as a Manager on the ramp. Sione's father has retired from the airlines and has 1 sibling that works in the airlines.	Ramp
11	Isileli Kongaika	3 years	(Tongan) Isileli is a Ramp Agent. Isileli's 2 uncles and 9 cousins (1 first cousin and 8 second cousins) all work for the airlines.	Ramp
12	Mafi Latu	11 years	(Tongan) Mafi is a Ramp Agent. He is currently certified as an Aircraft Load Agent. Mafi's 2 siblings and 6 cousins all work in the airlines.	Ramp
13	Senituli Loamanu	7 years *2 years with two other airlines, and 5 years with current airline*	(Tongan) Senituli is a Ramp Agent. He is currently a Tow Team Break Rider and has been certified as an Aircraft Load Agent. Senituli's father works in the airlines, for another company.	Tow Team
14	Nau Ma'asi	15 years	(Tongan) Nau is a Ramp Agent. She is currently a Trainer. She has held positions as an Aircraft Load Agent. She also has previously worked as a Ticketing Agent. Nau's spouse, 3 siblings, 1 uncle, 1 sister-in-law, 2 brothers-in-law, and 3 first	Admin

			cousins all work in the airlines. She also has 1 sibling that works in the airlines, for another company.	
15	Tevita Ma‘asi	4 years	(Tongan) Tevita is a Ramp Agent. Tevita’s spouse and 2 brothers-in-law all work in the airlines.	Ramp
16	John Mahe	8 years *4 years with another airline, 4 years with current airline*	(Tongan) John Mahe is a Ramp Agent. He has been certified as an Aircraft Load Agent, Dispatch and Tow Team Break Rider. He has held positions as a Parts Clerk and Parts Supervisor. John’s uncle and 6 cousins (2 first cousins and 4 second cousins) all work for the airlines.	Ramp
17	Tevita Maumau	13 years	(Tongan) Tevita is a Ramp Agent. He is currently certified as an Aircraft Load Agent. Tevita’s sibling works for another the airlines, for another company.	Ramp
18	Dan Moleni	15 years *3 years with another airline, 12 years with current airline*	(Tongan/Hawaiian) Dan is a Ramp Agent. Dan’s 2 siblings, 1 brother-in-law and 8 first cousins all work for the airlines.	Transfers
19	Phillip Moleni	14 years	(Tongan/White) Phillip is a Ramp Agent. He has been certified as an Aircraft Load Agent. Philip’s mother retired from the airlines. He has 3 siblings, 6 first cousins, and 4 co-workers married to first cousins that all work for the airlines. He has 1 sibling that works for the airlines, for another company.	Ramp
20	Pulu ‘Otukolo	12 years	(Tongan) Pulu is a Ramp Agent. He is currently certified as an Aircraft Load Agent.	Ramp

			Pulu's father retired from the airlines. He also has 1 sibling that works in the airlines, for another company.	
21	Toa Palu	10 years	(Tongan) Toa is a Ramp Agent. She has been certified as an Aircraft Load Agent. She has served in the roles of the Safety Team, Wellness Specialist and elected as a Representative for co-workers. She has previously worked as a Ticketing and Gate Agent. She also worked at the DFW station. Toa has a sibling, grandfather, 3 uncles, and 6 cousins (2 first cousins and 4 second cousins) that work for the airlines.	Bagroom
22	Pauliasi Pikula	17 years	(Tongan) Pauliasi is a Ramp Agent. He is currently certified as an Aircraft Load Agent. He has also held positions as a Dispatcher, Deice Pad Commander, and Agent in Charge. Pauliasi's has 1 brother, 1 uncle and 1 first cousin that all work for the airlines.	Ramp
23	David Pikula	15 years *1 year with another airline, 14 years with current airline*	(Tongan) David is a Ramp Agent. He has been certified as an Aircraft Load Agent. David's father and 1 first cousin both work for the airlines. He also has 1 sibling that works for the airlines, for another company.	Bagroom
24	Pauli Pekipaki	13 years	(Tongan) Pauli is a Ramp Agent. He is currently a Dispatcher. He also has held positions as a certified Aircraft Load Agent, and a Deice Pad Commander. Pauli's father and 3 uncles retired from the airlines. He also has 1 sibling, 1 uncle, 7 cousins (2 first cousins and 5 second cousins) that all work for the airlines.	Dispatch
25	Lio Pupunu	15 years	(Tongan) Lio is a Ramp Agent. He has been certified as an Aircraft Load Agent. Lio has many relatives that work in the airlines.	De-Ice

26	‘Inoke ‘Ofaloto Pututau	11 years	(Tongan) ‘Inoke is a Ramp Agent. He is currently a Load Desk Dispatcher. He has been certified as an Aircraft Load Agent, Dispatcher, Deice Lead Agent, Equipment Specialist, and a Tow Team Break Rider. He also worked at the STL and SEA stations. ‘Inoke’s 4 cousins (1 first cousin and 3 second cousins) work for the airlines. He also has 1 sibling that works for the airlines, for another company.	Load Desk
27	Isileli Talivakaola	11 years *3 years with another airline, 8 years with his current airline*	(Tongan) Isileli is a Ramp Agent. He has been certified as an Aircraft Load Agent. Isileli’s grandfather retired from the airlines, from another company, and his mother works in the airlines, for another company. His father also worked in the airlines before passing away, and he has 1 brother-in-law that works in the airlines.	Ramp
28	Misi Taumoepeau	12 years	(Tongan) Misi is a Ramp Agent. Misi’s father retired from the airlines.	De-Ice
29	Ryan Tu‘akoi	12 years	(Tongan) Ryan is a Ramp Agent. He is currently certified as an Aircraft Load Agent. He also worked at the SFO station. Ryan’s father and sister work in the airlines, for another company, and has an aunt that has retired from the airlines.	Ramp

* - *Work areas include ramp, transfers, bagroom, tow team, dispatch, load desk, and admin. Typically every 3-6 months, airline workers, if they desire to, have options to move to other work areas.*

In terms of gathering participants for this research, it had a sense of an organic feel to it. Throughout my time as a doctoral student and working at the airlines, many Tongan airline workers have asked about my studies during various occasions. The majority, after a brief description of my schooling experience and sharing my research around the airlines, asked to participate and support. For those that did not approach me prior to participating, I was asked by already confirmed participants to consider having other Tongan airline workers join the research.

Each time I approached another Tongan airline worker to see if they would be interested in participating, the majority accepted apart from a few (due to being shy and not confident in their ability to share their thoughts). However, accepting to participate or not, each person was in full support of my research and then asked me to consider approaching other co-workers that should participate. Some Tongan airline workers, after the data was collected, felt shafted and sad because they weren't asked to participate, but all were still very supportive and excited that I was moving forward with the research. The research slowly became bigger than I anticipated, but I then wanted to make sure I included as many voices as needed and that I could handle to enhance the knowledge many were willing to share with me. Almost all participants mentioned that they were not interested in any form of compensation to be a part of the research. To all of them, this was their opportunity to tauhi vā and reciprocate their support for a fellow Tongan pursuing a milestone that many of them were not afforded. One participant mentioned, "In a way, your success is our success". And then quickly after in a very Tongan humor reaction, the participant jokingly said, "also, just make sure my name is included on your degree, too" (laughter).

DATA COLLECTION

I conducted eight talanoa group sessions that consisted between 3-5 participants in each group, and each participant only was involved with one talanoa group session. Since I was not able to film each talanoa session in person, I recorded the different talanoa groups through the Zoom platform, but I did film my setting since that was what I had control of. The purpose of still filming my location during the recorded video chats/talanoa sessions was to attempt to still display the use of film engaging within a talanoa session. The filming would allow myself during the editing process to capture the ambiance of the space and if used beyond data collection, the footage could enhance the visual experience of those that watch a talanoa session. The initial

approach to hold individual talanoa sessions changed as participants were more comfortable with being a part of a group talanoa. Cameras can be a very intrusive object when filming, but since participants would not be able to see the cameras being used through my frame of our Zoom talanoa session, they would not have to worry as much as if it was physically in the same space they were located. However, participants were aware of the cameras being used in my space and the recording of the Zoom session. The recording and filming of each talanoa group allowed me to easily review and revisit each session through an editing software, Adobe Premeire Pro, and the possibility, if needed, to create multiple visual talanoa vignettes using different angles.

I engaged in the different types of talanoa, primarily talatalanoa, with participants during the data collection (Fa'avae et al, 2016). The talanoa focused on participants background information, how they came into their airline industry, their travel experience, relationships with other Tongans in/outside work, what they have learned and observed about Tongans (including themselves) at work, and how Tongans have navigated and carved out space within the airlines. Participants were allowed to lea fakaTonga (*speak in Tongan*) or speak in English, or both. Each talanoa group session lasted between one hour to an hour and half.

Since many of the participants wanted to be in groups, forming groups and finding a time that each group could meet was not as challenging as I anticipated. This was due to participants already familiar with one another, and time availability was primarily open for many due to pandemic restrictions. Zoom calls were ideal for these talanoa sessions and all 8 sessions were collected rather quickly. After each talanoa session, I uploaded the footage from my camera, Zoom recordings/audio on to my hard drive, labeled the files properly – each footage from my camera for each session was marked Talanoa1a.mov, Talanoa2a.mov, Talanoa3a.mov, and so on. Each Zoom recording was marked Talanoa1b.mp4, Talanoa2b.mp4, Talanoa3b.mp4, and so on.

Zoom audio for each session was marked Talanoa1c.m4a, Talanoa2c.m4a, Talanoa3c.m4a, and so on. All these files were organized properly in preparation to later upload them all into Adobe Premiere Pro to watch, listen, and analyze each talanoa session.

Table 3
Timeline of Talanoa Group Sessions

Group	Participants	Date	Time
1	Mafi Latu Paul Pikula David Pikula Lio Pupunu	September 10, 2020	8:00-9:30pm MT
2	Mateaki Heimuli Sefo Heimuli Nau Maʻasi Tevita Maʻasi	September 12, 2020	7:00-8:30pm MT
3	June Fiefia Langi Hola John Mahe	September 13, 2020	12:00-1:30pm MT
4	Isi Kongaika Dan Moleni Isileli Talivakaola	September 13, 2020	5:00-6:30pm MT
5	Alexander Fiefia Tevita Maumau Phillip Moleni Pulu Otukolo	September 13, 2020	8:00-9:30pm MT
6	Josephine Akoula Racheal Haiola Toa Palu	September 14, 2020	2:00-3:30pm MT
7	Sione Kinikini Pauli Pekipaki Misi Taumoepeau	September 15, 2020	10:00-11:30am MT
8	Samiuela Afu ʻInoke Ofaloto Pututau Star Loamanu Ryan Tuʻakoi	September 16, 2020	10:00-11:30am MT

After the data collection, this was not planned and unexpected, and although the participants felt I had reciprocated and nurtured relations with each of them, they didn't expect to receive a koloa (*gift of gratitude*) from my family and me. Since there were more participants than I had anticipated, my wife, Tali, and I still felt the need to gift two small prints (dimensions)

of her paintings. Each participant received a print called *Umbilicus* and *Fonua Frigate*. The painting *Umbilicus* consists of bags of kava within a large duffle bag that has a baggage tag from a flight attached to one of its handles. Tali (2017) explains this painting about how kava is transported from the island it was grown on to the diaspora. She continues by mentioning that kava continues to be consumed and shared amongst those in the diaspora, which connects people to one another and people to the motherland. *Fonua Frigate* is a painting with a large suitcase that is open, has a large ngatu folded inside of it, and a baggage tag and a standby tag from a flight attached to the handle. When translated from Tongan, Fonua is *land* and Frigate refers to the frigate bird that was used for navigational purposes by Moana navigators/voyagers to locate land (Tali, 2017). Tali (2017) shares the significance of the Ngatu as a precious piece of culture that is passed around between families and community at special occasions, and this allows others to recognize and find community, but also help navigate one's Tongan identity.

Lastly, I engaged with autoethnography, a critical qualitative approach that highlights and centers stories. Autoethnography allowed me to use talanoa on a personal level and share my ngaahi talanoa (*stories*) of the airlines within this research (Fa'avae, 2018a). It also allowed me to be reflexive of my experience with the airlines as well as my process of building and nurturing relationships with my Tongan co-workers. My autoethnography was done in written form and completed after the data collection. It is woven throughout the analysis.

ANALYSIS

All the footage, recordings and audio were saved on an external hard drive that was only kept in my possession. I then uploaded the recordings and footage into Adobe Premiere Pro (a video editing software) and organized the files the same way they were organized on my external hard drive. This allowed each of the files to be separated into folders (Talanoa 1, Talanoa 2,

Talanoa 3, and so on) that correlated with each talanoa session they belonged to. Meaning in the Talanoa 1 folder, one would expect to find the following files: Talanoa1a.mov, Talanoa1b.mp4, and Talanoa1c.m4a. Once uploaded, I had the opportunity to watch and edit the footage by using exploratory coding (Saldaña, 2016). I decided that I would not include any video content as part of the dissertation but would still use the video content to analyze the data. I was able to sort through all the footage I had from the talanoa group sessions and placed time markers to distinguish when someone began talking and ended talking. The time markers act as a reference point on Adobe Premiere Pro that allows the user to also leave remarks/notes on them. The time markers were helpful as it cut out the need to review dead space (meaning moments where no one was talking and/or the talanoa was not worth marking or saving).

Once I inserted all the necessary time markers, I then created a spreadsheet to take more detailed notes. The spreadsheet would allow me to view the data all in one place without having to open and close different talanoa sessions on Adobe Premiere Pro. The spreadsheet included the following as labels on the first row to help organize the data:

- Name (Participant's Name)
- Talanoa Group (1 – 8)
- Time Stamp (Time participant began to speak)
- Remarks (Brief summary of what was shared within time stamp)
- Codes/themes (Key words that could be themes from participant's remarks)

- RQ1 (relevant: yes/no and if yes, how?) (Detail describing relevancy, if applicable)
- RQ2 (relevant: yes/no and if yes, how?) (Detail describing relevancy, if applicable)
- RQ3 (relevant: yes/no and if yes, how?) (Detail describing relevancy, if applicable)

The process took a lot of time to review, but once everything was organized on the spreadsheet with all the information gathered from the 8 talanoa sessions, I could better visualize and create strong codes/themes that seemed to be constantly reflected in the study. From these codes/themes, I then was able to narrow my focus and analyze to see how these codes/themes

were relevant to one of the three research questions. As I continued to analyze the data, I began to pay attention to what messages that were matched with the research questions could form a solid and meaningful vignette. Once the vignettes were chosen, I listened again to the participants message on Adobe Premiere Pro and transcribed what was shared. I concluded my analysis by weaving my autoethnography throughout the themes of the research.

If the opportunity arises to transform the written work of the talanoa group sessions into a digital/visual format, I could edit and overlay visuals while participants are talking. These overlays are called b-roll. These are visuals that help supplement what participants are saying. For example, the talanoa could lead to a moment of sharing a story related to flying. As the editor, I would have the choice of using footage or a picture related to flying (e.g., airplane taking off, inside of an airplane, etc.) to overlay this visual/imagery while the participant is talking. Sound can also play a part in enhancing and capturing the essence of the talanoa, but if not done correctly, it may distract from the themes/messages shared by participants. Text may be used for several reasons: describe location, date, time, names, etc. If participants are speaking another language or the sound was not able to capture a clear audio of what the participant said, text can be used as subtitles.

As I completed my analysis, having the recordings and footage allowed me to remember nuances that were caught on camera and through the audio that might've been forgotten or misunderstood as I revisited the various group talanoa sessions. The voices and knowledge shared by all the participants, as well as my own experiences through autoethnography will display Tongan knowledge production that exists within the airline industry.

CHAPTER 5: NAVIGATING SKYSPACE

SLC, TBU, GRU, and MCZ. As an airline employee, one of the first parts of training one receives is learning airport codes. These three-letter (and four-letter) codes are shortened versions to locate specific airports and assist in efficiently going through the travel process (from booking a ticket, to luggage tags, documentation, and other identifiable airline practices)[6]. The four listed airport city codes I listed earlier are a few codes I became familiar with due to living or spending at least two months in these locations prior to working in the airlines: SLC (Salt Lake City, UT, U.S.), TBU (Tongatapu, TO), GRU (São Paulo, BR) and MCZ (Maceió, BR). I've memorized many city codes, but I may not be able to properly pinpoint them all on a map if asked where these airports are located. Two other places that have significance for me are HNL (Honolulu, HI, U.S.) where my wife grew up and our most visited destination, and LAX (Los Angeles, CA, U.S.) the city we lived for four years during schooling in pursuits of my graduate degree at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and where we lived the longest outside of Salt Lake City.

As for Tongans, SLC, LAX, HNL are destinations to visit due to family and other connections, but TBU, AKL, NAN (Nadi, FJ), SYD (Sydney, AU), BNE (Brisbane, AU), SFO (San Francisco, CA, U.S.), SJC (San Jose, CA, U.S.), OAK (Oakland, CA, U.S.), LGB (Long Beach, CA, U.S.), ONT (Ontario, CA, U.S.), DFW (Dallas-Fort Worth, TX, U.S.), PHX

[6] The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and International Air Transport Association (IATA) are the two entities that work together with the countries around the world and airlines to create the 3-4 letter codes associated with the airports (Hope, 2017). In the 1930s, airports chose their own airport codes and only consisted of two letters, but by the 1940s, there were too many airports and a new system needed to be implemented to avoid the confusion and possible duplicate codes (Hope, 2017). No two airports have the same three-letter codes and it's usually related somehow to the city name (MIA, Miami, FL, U.S.), name of the airport (JFK, New York, NY, U.S. – John F. Kennedy International Airport), or another meaningful identifier (ORD, Chicago, IL, U.S. – previous name of airport was Orchard Field).

(Phoenix, AZ, U.S.), and SEA (Seattle-Tacoma, WA, U.S.) are some of the locations you can guarantee Tongans will also travel, too. In an earlier chapter the airports specifically listed here in the U.S., Tongans that have left the motherland and have come to the U.S. have created communities near these airports, work at these airports, and commonly travel through these airports to reach other Tongan communities.

Ka‘ili (2021) shared that the memorization of airports was very similar to that of ancient times in Tonga. He elaborates on how important seaports were for double-hulled canoes as they were memorialized in proverbs, such as, (1) Tefua ‘a vaka Lautala (*Gathering of the vaka to Lautala*). Lautala (in Hā‘ano, Ha‘apai, Tonga) was a highly significant seaport. It was known for its knowledge and skills in repairing canoes. Tefua ‘a vaka Lautala means the gathering of canoes to Lautala to conduct important work. (2) Fasi pē sila tuku ki Manono (*If your canoe’s boom is broken, leave it to Manono*). Manono was a famous seaport in Sāmoa for repairing canoes.

In this chapter, I will explore themes that emerged through the different talanoa groups related and connected to ways in which Tongans have used and understood skyspace. How are Tongans navigating skyspace through the airline industry to gain learning opportunities? In the first section of this chapter, it is important to recognize the foundation being laid by the participants regarding how to navigate skyspace? This in-depth section also sets up context to better relate to the rest of the findings. I’ll discuss the experiential knowledge, skills, and strategies gained in becoming a voyager of the skies. This includes navigating the airport, understanding flight loads/schedules, flying etiquette and more. The piecing of these various markers are examples of learning possibilities from the beginning of one’s travel to their final destination. Once a foundation of learning is recognized, the last section will put into practice the

knowledge Tongans in the airlines experience through skyspace. This process of navigating skyspace are ways Tongans understand the rhythms and beats (Tā) that manifest through the skies (Vā). The findings regarding skyspace adds on another element that expands Tā-Vā notions by absorbing time and extending Vā. This understanding then leads to learning opportunities that extend beyond the constructs of the airlines, but education that Tongans take advantage of by also participating in tertiary schooling, and through experiences that happens by visiting other parts of the world.

MORE THAN JUST A PAYCHECK

When one decides to take a flight somewhere, the process usually consists of an individual connecting to an airline reservation/ticketing agent to book their trip, seeking out a reservation agency to book their ticket, or go online to book their own ticket through an airline website or a third-party reservation website. Having a reservation/ticketing agent help through the booking process means that the passenger only is responsible to state when and where the person will be flying to, is it a round trip ticket, first class or economy, and are there other people traveling on the itinerary. The reservation agent will gather this information (and collect other necessary details for the travel, especially if it is an international trip) and process the trip itinerary and flight details for the passenger with the total costs of the flight. Sometimes, the reservation agent will take the next step and ask if ground transportation is needed (a rental vehicle) and/or lodging can be provided through the agency? This could potentially eliminate other planning details for a passenger if these other services are provided and bundled in a travel package. As an individual booking their own flight, the responsibility is on the individual to make sure they understand guidelines and the continual changes that occur with airline and international travel policies. This information is usually shared by a reservation agent and is

always available for passengers, but most likely is found in the fine print. The responsibilities to understand the extra nuances of flying can make the travel experience challenging and stressful, especially if there are others involved in the travel plans, such as friends and family.

The extra nuances that exist in air travel are the insights and knowledge of what many airline employees understand and helps enhance their travel experience, but also this is how Tongans (and many other Moana peoples) use this knowledge for the benefit of the family and community. Not all voyagers of the sea were the lead person of a vessel, navigator, or a captain. Many traveled/voyaged their way around the ocean by being on various trips and helping play a role when and where it was needed. There is a Tongan Proverb which states, "Takanga 'Etau Fohe" which refers to the task at hand will be successful if all involved are working in unison. While not everyone is a navigator, everyone has a role to play and when you need to row you must do so in sync. The act of rowing in unison and in synchrony are expressions of tā and vā. In a similar fashion, Tongans have always been mobile and have figured out ways to be voyagers of the sky with the connections through the airlines. This section will explore the different ways of Tongan mobility that goes beyond what is understood as the status quo of a passenger.

'Inoke Pututau (but more commonly known as 'Ofa), 11 years with the airlines, graduated with me in high school. He started with the airlines in SLC, transferred to STL (St. Louis, MO, U.S.), then to SEA, and back to SLC. Samiuela Afu, 6 years with the airlines, began his career in SFO before transferring to SLC. So, both 'Ofa and Samiuela have had opportunities to work in different cities and airports. Within their talanoa group, they had a quick discussion about the ease of traveling.

“To have the ability to fly anywhere in the United States for free, and to get a discounted rate to fly to Tonga or Sāmoa for you and the rest of your family is a big blessing for all of us”, said ‘Ofa.

Samiuela quickly responded, “Yeah, within minutes if something happens this weekend you can book a flight and you’re gone.”

“Exactly!”, ‘Ofa in agreement.

“How cool is that? It’s amazing!”, Samiuela’s quick reflection on the process of booking a flight.

This understanding and ease of booking a flight doesn’t happen instantaneously. It does take time for one to learn the system and is very intimidating in the beginning, but it also begins conversations with other co-workers to learn the best practices as a non-revenue passenger. A non-revenue passenger (also referred to as non-rev for short) is one that has received certain flying benefits according to an airline's policy if space is available on an aircraft for the individual to travel. As one becomes more familiar with flying and the experience of being on flights, the process can become second nature. As long as one can get to the gate before the doors are closed with everything needed to go on a trip, the latest to book a flight and check-in for the flight could happen all between 40 minutes to two hours prior to departure (this process depends on the destination one is traveling to and the airport one is flying out of). The ability and knowledge to understand passenger loads, number of non-stop flights to a destination, re-routing options, if necessary, gate location for flights (including re-routing options), and organizing all this while being mindful of time zones are skills that an airline employee embodies and prepares for when travel plans are in motion.

There was an occasion my family and I had traveled to BOS (Boston, MA, U.S.) to celebrate the graduation of a childhood friend. There were over 60+ family and friends that were Tongans attending the graduation, and most of us that were present had flown there as non-revenue passengers. Graduating cohort members of my friend knew she was from Utah, but when they saw all her family and friends, they questioned that she might actually be from the Boston area because so many people were in attendance. If my friend was not from Boston or the Northern part of the East Coast, how did so many Tongans travel cross country to attend her graduation? The next day when it came time to return home, I had to figure out the best route home, especially since there were other non-revenue passengers from the same event returning to the same place. These are the moments that turn Tongans within the airlines from passengers to voyagers. The best route home was on the non-stop from BOS to SLC. However, due to non-revenue boarding procedures (which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter), my family and I had to find another route. Within minutes, I was fortunate to find a flight leaving within the next hour. We would have to make a connection through DTW (Detroit, MI, U.S.), layover for 40 minutes, and hope that space would be available from DTW to SLC. Worst case scenario, if we did not get any seats on the SLC flight departing from DTW, because that was the last flight of the night, we would spend the night in DTW and catch the first flight in the morning to SLC. Our flight left BOS on time, our connection gate in DTW was in the same terminal (two gates down from our arrival gate), but were there enough seats for my family and me to SLC? At the time, we needed three open seats - one for my wife, our oldest child, and myself. Our second child was with us as well, but he was still an infant. That meant he could travel as an infant in arms with either my wife or me. If there was a situation where one seat was available, my wife would travel with our son to get home, and my oldest and I would wait it out for the next

available flight. If two seats were available, my wife would travel with both our children, and I would wait for the next available flight. Another option could be seeking out another connection flight to get closer to home or bypass the one or two open seats to stay together. Luckily, there were seats available for my family and me on the flight to SLC.

These are some of the decisions a voyager of the skies must make. This was just my experience on this specific return trip, but the other 60+ Tongans that traveled as non-revenue passengers also had to make their voyage back home, too. Since we all were traveling as non-revenue passengers, the side conversations that were being had at the graduation was when were people traveling home and on what flights to avoid being stuck? Some left during the graduation celebration to avoid the later travel, others made a longer trip by extending their stay, and others extended their trip by going to another city for vacation or to visit their family. These conversations also happened prior to the graduation celebrations. Family and friends leaving early to avoid travel near the graduation day, and routes taken through different cities due to the non-stop route not being an option.

When flying perks/benefits are discussed by airline employees with their family and friends that are not in the airline industry, these sets of skills are not usually part of the conversation. The majority of the time, the access to fly is the main focus. The skills may not be mentioned due to the flying process becoming normalized that only new airline employees or non-airline employees will recognize.

Another one of the talanoa group sessions included three Heimuli siblings (Sefo, Nau and Mateaki) and one of their spouses (Tevita Ma‘asi, also goes by Saka and is Nau’s husband). The Heimuli family grew up a few blocks away from my childhood home, and Nau and I were classmates throughout our K-12 experience. She also graduated with ‘Ofa and me in high school.

In thinking about our Tongan graduating class from high school, 7 of the 22 Tongan seniors that year are currently (or have worked) in the airline industry. Nau, 15 years with the airlines, has currently taken on the role of a Trainer to assist and educate new hires of their work responsibilities and oversee hundreds of co-workers to be in compliance with company and industry regulations. She and her younger brother Mateaki, 7 years in the airlines, explained some strategies he uses to make their travel easier. He starts off by sharing his experiences of how he and his family begin their travels,

> We take a stroller, which allows us to go through the family line [some airport TSA have these lines available] which helps us get through TSA faster. When we get to the front, they see that my youngest is way too big for the stroller, but it still gets us through the line faster...and in some of the bigger airports, we can put a kid in the stroller and still get around faster. We also need to get to the airport early to strategize. If we're not able to make a flight, we can see who can go together on this flight and who has to stay and catch the next one.

Nau then added,

> If we were traveling as much as I would like to, and especially international, then I would consider getting Global Entry or TSA precheck. I can't justify buying those services because I don't fly, specifically internationally, often. If I flew a lot, then I would invest in something like that, but I don't. People ask us, 'why don't you fly more often?' They're forgetting that this is still a job. We do get to fly free, but we still have to pay for the place we'll be staying at and how to get around. But adding on to what Mateaki was talking about at the airport, not checking bags will help speed up the process. Once you check in your bag, it's locked to a certain destination. If you don't make the flight, you have to change your route. Your bag will get to your destination before you, but you also may not get to the destination [*laughter from group*]. Then you'll have to call to get your bags back and figure out that whole process. So, it's important to consider before flying, is it worth checking in a bag or should we just take carry-on?

Mateaki quickly responded,

> That cuts a lot of the time by not having to check in bags. We can check in for our flight on our phones and go directly to the TSA line. So, it's good to downsize...and as someone with not a lot of seniority, we get stuck and it's good to have our clothes with us to then check-in to a hotel. We have everything we need to freshen up for the next day.

To clarify what Mateaki shared about 'seniority', some airlines use a seniority system to decide who gets on flights first. So, if an airline employee is just starting their job and is trying to fly on a flight with other airline employees that have multiple years of service, the person with the least amount of time typically will have to wait until those with higher seniority get their seat assignments. There are other nuances of how that process plays out, but that is the basic understanding of seniority-based systems within some airlines. So as Mateaki brought up, "If we're not able to make a flight, we can see who can go together on this flight and who has to stay and catch the next one." This is similar to the scenario I explained earlier in this chapter that my family and I had to deal with during our return trip from the BOS airport. Mateaki shares that if others in the traveling party can leave sooner due to some seats being available, that means less seats are needed to make the upcoming flight. For example, if Mateaki was traveling with his family (party of five), and only three seats were available, Mateaki and his wife would have the decision of splitting up or traveling together? However, if they don't split up and there were only two seats available on the next flight, they would then be faced with the same decision to split up or travel together. If they had decided to split up earlier, then the two waiting for the next flight would be able to take the available two seats.

These practical skills are important to consider as travel through the skies and knowledge of skyspace don't begin when the aircraft is about to take off from a runway, but the preparation and process that happens prior to air travel and being comfortable within the airport environment is key to creating smooth, efficient and an enjoyable flying experience. Unloading check-in luggage from curbside to the check-in counter, quickly familiarizing oneself with the airport layout, remembering check-in and carry-on luggage rules, obtaining a boarding pass, having all the proper documentation for screening purposes, wait times in lines, and understanding

boarding procedures can be stressful. However, once this process is learned through multiple airport and travel experiences, more skills and knowledge are gained to voyage air travel better.

Tevita Maumau, 13 years with the airlines, and Phillip Moleni, 14 years with the airlines, both shared in their talanoa group how as Moana peoples, we have always been navigators. Tevita shared,

> None of us [those on a part of the talanoa group] were raised in the islands, but we know we come from seafaring people who love to explore. I think we all have that in us naturally. That's why you see so many Polynesians in the airlines. We naturally love to travel, and we don't have boats to do it, but we have planes that act as our boats.

Later on, in the talanoa, Phillip built on the insights and thoughts Tevita discussed,

> My mom worked for the airlines growing up, and it was always something me and my family always wanted. I also wanted to refer back to Ti's [Tevita's] comments when he talked about how we were traveling people and that is what we are known for. But also, to add on how many of us understand the importance of a tight knit family. If we have a family member in Florida we never met before, since we have the flying benefits, we can fly over there. There's actually been a few instances where we've gone to a lot of places and were able to meet family members we never would've met without the airlines.

Living in the diaspora, it can be challenging to stay connected to one's Tongan heritage and culture because the knowledge is not readily available if it is not taught or discussed at home. Many of the first Tongans that arrived in the U.S. were rarely challenged about their identity as a Tongan, so assimilating to the U.S. way of life was only adding on to their knowledge as they sought out ways to fit in within U.S. society (Hafoka et al, 2014). So, if one was not actively engaged in learning about Tongan identity, one would have very little access to the history and culture of Tonga. However, Tevita illustrates the connection to voyaging from the past with his ancestors, but also makes relevant how voyaging occurs as airline employees that navigate through the skies. Phillip adds that the component of staying connected, within the context of family, is an important concept to practice and that the ability to reach places in the world through air travel builds and strengthens those connections. This notion of flying to connect or

stay connected is a constant topic that many bring up within the talanoa groups, but I hope to explore this notion further to possibly help clarify nuances that may exist with this notion.

Returning back to the Heimuli talanoa group, Sefo, the oldest of the siblings and the one with the least amount of work experience with the airlines in relation to his siblings with 6 years, shared a story of when he was returning home from Hawai‘i,

> Every time we come back from Hawai‘i, we always bring back something. My sisters and them [siblings] would message me, ‘Bring back some musubi’ and then they would Venmo me. I remember one time I came back with 92 musubi [a slice of spam in between white rice that’s wrapped in nori] [*Nau laughing in the background*]. I put them all in my checked in luggage, and when we went to go and weigh it, it was over 10 lbs. [the luggage was over the allotted weight restriction before fees could be applied]. We took half of the musubi to distribute them in our carry-on luggage, and the checked in luggage weighed just fine [*Sefo laughed*]. A lot of people go through a lot just to bring stuff back for their families. We already know when we come back from Hawai‘i, it’s already expected that we come back with musubi, Li Hing Mui candy, etc.

Listening to Sefo’s story was not an uncommon one to hear throughout the different talanoa sessions. My father-in-law and mother-in-law also live in Hawai‘i and almost every return trip my family and I make from visiting them, we return with one or two (sometimes three or four) boxes of mei (*breadfruit*) they have grown in their backyard. There is so much that they freeze it and save it for when we visit, so that we can bring it back to Salt Lake City since mei is a delicacy that is hard to get in the continental U.S. amongst Tongans, especially in Utah. In the story, *The Boat that Went to Pulotu*, has a part that illustrates how food, such as kahokaho yams and taros, were brought from Pulotu to Tonga in voyaging canoes (Gifford, 1924; Ka‘ili, 2021). An example of how this practice of transporting food is still repeated in current times through the skyscape.

Sefo’s story also reminded me of when I was working a 16-hour shift and I received a call from my first cousin. He said that there was going to be a celebration that weekend for his son’s baptism. He then proceeded to ask if there was any way I could fly to ANC (Anchorage,

AK, U.S.) to his sister to bring back some fish for the celebration. As an airline employee, we are typically allowed to check in two luggage at 50 pounds (23 kilograms) each. Due to my schedule for the rest of that week, if there was going to be a time to make this request a reality, I would need to leave after my 16-hour shift that day to fly to Alaska. I would have to arrive in ANC to quickly meet up with my cousin at the airport, check in the two 50-pound boxes of fish, rush through security to the departure gate, and then fly back to SLC just in time to begin my shift the next morning. As tired as I was, I agreed. That night, I ended up working the ANC flight and before the flight attendant closed the doors of the Boeing 737 aircraft, I took my seat and quickly tried to get some sleep. When we landed, I had an hour and half to quickly catch up with my cousin, get the fish checked in, and back to the gate to depart back to SLC. As I woke up and walked out from the jet bridge into the airport from the return flight to SLC, my manager was there to welcome me back home and directed me to work the next gate over that had a flight departing to SFO. Later that weekend, I was looking forward to eating some of the fish that I had brought from Alaska. However, my cousin, who is also a well-known community leader amongst our Tongan people, decided to distribute the fish to all the widows in the area rather than save it for the celebration. Although I was a bit disappointed to not have any fish to enjoy (especially the travel needed to be done to bring the fish), I recognized the importance of giving and that the widows and their families could use the fish more than those of us attending the celebration of my cousin's son.

Many Tongans in the airlines begin their travels as children since their parents are/were airline employees. Children of airline employees are sometimes referred to as 'airline babies/kids' or 'standby babies/kids'. We learned that Phillip was an 'airline kid' growing up in his remarks earlier. Pulu 'Otukolo, 12 years with the airlines, and Rachael Haiola, 7 years with

the airlines, both shared in their respective talanoa groups experiences of also being 'airline kids' and how they not only were allowed access to fly, but within a Tongan family, that privilege gave them fatongia (*duty, responsibility*) to fulfill for their family. Pulu, the oldest of 14 children, shared,

> I basically grew up non-reving. My aunt started working for an airline. She had custody over me, so I flew under her benefits. When she was done (working for the airlines), my dad got on the airlines in the mid 90s. So, I could fly whenever, wherever. I mean, when I was young, I didn't like it because my parents were like, 'hey could you fly there and get this?' and in my mind [*with a frustration in his face sharing this*], I had to do it.

The group laughed at Pulu's frustration because there was this shared understanding with all of us a part of the talanoa that the question Pulu's parents asked wasn't really a question, but that Pulu was being volun-told and that he didn't really have a choice. Pulu later shared that as time passed on, he recognized the importance of this fatongia and came to appreciate this role he was tasked to do by his parents and other elders in his family. Rachael shared her experience on how she and her twin sister were born the year their mother started working for the airlines and her feelings flying at a young age,

> I've flown my whole life, ever since I could remember. I have a mahanga, a twin, and we flew everywhere around the states. We've been to Tonga, the only place outside of the country...[*Rachael then asked the group*] What was the age where we could fly by ourselves? [*Josephine Akauola (another participant in this talanoa group) responded, 'It was 8 years old, but changed to 6 years old as unaccompanied minors'*]. Yeah, so me and my twin flew everywhere by ourselves. You know as Tongans and especially within our culture, we need to attend every function, wedding, funeral. So, me and my twin were like my mom's personal FedEx. We'd fly to Missouri to pick up wedding cakes and fly to Hawai'i to pick up leis. It was kind of a lot, but it was also kind of fun because we got to do this at such a young age... We went to a year around school, so we were off track for like three weeks which allowed us to travel often. So, you'd see two little ten-year-old traveling with four coolers, or whatever by ourselves. Even though it was a lot, we actually loved doing it because every time we'd go to Hawai'i, we'd just go swimming while my aunt would prepare the coolers, or leis, or whatever, and after swimming, we'd fly right back. It was fun and we were fortunate to travel to so many places. It was nice!

There is the shared understanding amongst Tongans that koloa (*gifts*) are to be traveled with to and from various destinations. Through the different experiences shared amongst the participants/colleagues and my own experience, I see koloa as a practice that serves many purposes. The faa‘i kaveikoula (*golden or fundamental values*) is reflected in these purposes and the values are well represented through this process. Faka‘apa‘apa (*respect*) is demonstrated through the giving of koloa. By treating others with kindness and offering koloa upholds the valuable practice of koloa giving. That is a sign of faka‘apa‘apa. It shows gratitude and lolotō (*humility*) to share this koloa. Tongans may refer to themselves, and/or their gifts, as being lowly. However, this is significant as it is a form of expressing lolotō to those receiving the koloa. When one receives the koloa, the value of mamahi‘ime‘a (*loyalty, commitment*) is demonstrated. The first part of the term of mamahi‘ime‘a (mamahi) is translated as *hurt/pain*. To receive a koloa, one recognizes that sense of mamahi that went into the creation or collection of the koloa, and that gratitude is reciprocated through the *commitment to one another/loyalty*. The willingness to hurt also demonstrates mamahi‘ime‘a. The last kaveikoula of tauhi vā (*nurturing of relations*) is strengthened. There is a sense of being mindful of how one is needed to enter a space, but also how to uphold the relations to create vā lelei. ‘Ofa (*love*) is expressed through this process and helps bring all of the kaveikoula together.

These experiences also show another form of mobility. Traveling to the various destinations to attend different functions or events, and/or traveling to take/pick up significant material to use as koloa are ways in which Tongans become representatives of their family and community. Traveling is another site of knowledge holding, learning how to be representatives and learning about genealogy and relationships through experience, which improves the ability to serve the kāinga. Those that are traveling act as a vessel for those not able to travel - not

everyone is going, but everyone is going. This allows for flexibility as Tongans make the best of the situations that are given. While those that are not able to travel continue to work and fulfill their other responsibilities, those that have access to travel take koloa, news, and knowledge to those that will be at the function or event. When those that traveled return to their homes, they return with koloa, news and knowledge from the function or event and share and relay this information with those that did not travel.

TAKING TĀ-VĀ TO THE SKIES

> My dad worked at the airlines, and he would send us on day trips to pick up some stuff. He had seven kids, so he split us up. You fly here, you fly there, and bring the stuff back for this putu [*funeral*]. We grew up around that, and you could see the love we would have for our own people. We were taught to go out of our own way to make things happen. Personally, it put some pressure on me, but it showed the love I have for my family by making those trips. It comes back to our culture, the love, the respect, wanting to be there for everything. We'll try to do whatever we can to fulfill that responsibility. It's fun.

This reflection shared by Isileli Talivakaola (will be referred to as Talivakaola from here on out due to another Isileli as a participant), 11 years with the airlines, is connected to the sentiments shared before being an 'airline kid'. Both of Talivakaola's parents worked in the airline industry, at different companies, during the beginning of the 2000s. Although this experience is similar to that of Pulu and Rachael, the part of Talivakaola and his siblings being separated on different day trip flights to obtain significant material or knowledge needed for a familial or cultural event is an example of ways in which Tongans in the airlines are able to express their mana (*power*) by having these travel services.

Ka'ili (2017a) shared a story about Maui [demigod] in ancient Tonga and how he was able to push up langi (*sky*) to allow the people enough space to walk upright. He continues to connect this story as a symbolic understanding of how the people in the lands of Tonga were oppressed. Langi was representative of a chief from a foreign land, and that Maui was able to

create distance to allow the people of Tonga to be free (walk upright). In thinking of Maui's story and how it plays out today, the extension of space into the sky has allowed Tongans in the airlines the ability to not just walk upright but navigate/voyage into langi. This ability to travel through langi/skyspace brings on nuances of socio-spatial connections related to tā-vā. Vā is discussed as space, but also socio-spatial relations meaning the way people operate and connect with one another (Ka'ili, 2005; 2017a; Ka'ili, Māhina & Addo, 2017). Also, the skyscape was important in navigating the seascape, such as the story of Hina living on the moon and making tapa connects to ways of Tongans understanding their Indigenous astronomy and starloes (Gifford, 1924; Ka'ili, 2021). As Tongans gather to connect, time from a western context becomes conflicted, and to mediate the conflicts, it is needed to seek ways of "extending the lengths of events in order to give rise to harmonious and beautiful social space" (Ka'ili, 2017a). The extension of time allows for more melie (*sweet*) opportunities to participate in the event and to nurture and strengthen relations.

Returning to Talivakola's situation, time doesn't get extended, but becomes condensed when traveling through the skies. The time needed for Talivakaola's family to gather material and knowledge for an event that was possibly happening within a week would have easily taken weeks to months in considering shipping time as well as monetary needs to purchase and ship everything. However, by having Talivakaola and his siblings separate and fly to different places demonstrates how they accumulated and absorbed time. Beats become a faster rhythm and it can be challenging to find the rhythm just as Talivakaola mentioned, "Personally, it put some pressure on me, but it showed the love I have for my family by making those trips." As Talivakaola found the rhythm of this new fast-paced beat, he saw that the feeling shifted from pressure to melie as he was willing to continue his fatongia and travel due to the love he has for

his family. Talivakaola's story shows that no one person has all the wealth, but by physically going to places, he and his siblings each became vā. Although time was absorbed, vā continued to be extended as each person became the socio-spatial connector to honor their family.

Mafi Latu, 11 years with the airlines, is one of nine siblings (all brothers) and he joined the airlines because two of his brothers were already working in the airline industry and felt like it would be a good fit for him, too. In Mafi's talanoa group, he begins a discussion around an uncommon aspect of travel about some co-workers,

> There aren't very many jobs that I know of where you can finish school in another state and be able to work in the airlines. I only know of you (referring to me, 'Inoke Hafoka) and Dan Moleni. Dan goes back and forth and he's working on his degree, and I only see him once or twice a week. So, to be able to get all your shifts covered and be able to still have that job and flying benefits, that's a perk of working in the airlines.

Dan Moleni, 15 years with the airlines, shares an impactful memory of a time he remembers studying during his downtime in one of the work breakrooms,

> I was flipping through my textbook; I think it was college algebra or something like that. Someone came up to me and said, 'What are you doing?' I said that I'm doing some homework for school. He was like, 'Wow, you're in the wrong place. You need to get out of here and go chase after your dreams.' That stuck with me! It kind of motivated me to fulfill my goals, but still hold to what I was doing which was work with the airlines. I'm currently pursuing a graduate degree, and when I look back, I've proven this guy wrong in a way...being Tongan and working in the airlines is a positive thing.

Dan is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Chiropractic (DC) in Northern California. He continues to travel back and forth as he lives with his family in California and is completing school there but returns to Utah to work in the airlines. As someone that traveled for four years back and forth from Southern California and Utah almost on a weekly basis, like what Dan is currently doing now, the question comes up to why would Dan and I do something like this? Also, other questions to be asked are if we wanted to continue working for the airlines, couldn't we just transfer to the nearest airport where we were living in California? Where does one find the time

during graduate school to, not only work another job, but a job that is in another state? To begin answering these questions, Dan continues to share from his previous comments, "I've gained a family with the airlines, and it connects us as Tongans. It encourages us to live our cultural beliefs and share our values with others."

David Pikula, 15 years with the airlines, was an 'airline kid' as his father started working for the airlines in the mid 90s. He expands a bit of Dan's sentiments around 'gaining a family' within the airlines,

> For us as Polynesians, we all get it. There's stuff that comes up and there's a person at work willing to help you out. And it goes around. You might have a funeral that you need to go to, and that person at work helps you out. A year or two later, that person needs help, and you help that person. We get it, we understand it.

The support and community that exists within the workplace is a topic that I will discuss and expound more upon in a later chapter. However, this practice of helping one another is also relevant to the questions that were recently posed regarding the travel Dan and I experience(d) from living and attending school in California, and traveling to work at the airlines in Utah. Dan and I spent a good portion of our lives residing in Utah and working at the SLC airport. The ample amount of time in the space of Utah allowed Dan and I to strengthen relationships within our Tongan community. These relations carried over into our professional duties as airline employees because many of our Tongan community worked with us. This was the difference between transferring to a new workstation and staying in SLC. The relationships nurtured in SLC allowed other Tongan co-workers to find ways to support us in our educational pursuits. Outside of Dan and myself, there are many other Tongans in the airlines that have found ways to continue their schooling from associate degrees to doctorate degrees. In the next chapter, I will expound more on ways in which Tongan airline workers have been able to make these educational pursuits (and other interests) a reality while holding on to our jobs in the airlines.

One aspect that has been very helpful while those of us are and have pursued school is the help in getting our work shifts covered. Many Tongan airline co-workers may not have the means to support our endeavors financially, but by helping with swapping and covering shifts was another alternative way of showing one's support.

Also, during these travels back and forth from California and Utah, Dan and I enrolled in TSA precheck and Global Entry. These are programs that are part of the federal programs that allow members to expedite lines at U.S. airports (TSA precheck) and crossing international borders (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). Having TSA precheck was key to get through airport security lines quicker and allow more flexibility on arrival time to the airport. For me, I got to a point where I could arrive at the airport, get through security, and arrive at the gate just in time to take my seat as the last or one of the last passengers to board. This cut my wait time at the airport and allowed me an hour or two to fulfil other responsibilities before a flight and after arriving from a flight.

In a talanoa that Isileli Talivakaola was having with Isileli Kongaika (will be known as Kongaika from here on out due to another Isileli as a participant), they discussed the expansion of vā in terms of taking the time to learn about different parts of the world that don't necessarily have connections to Tongans or family members. Talivakaola excitedly shared,

> The experiences and places I've been to are because of this job. It's a plus. We can expand our horizons and see different places and experience a lot of different things...it's within us to travel and experience the world.

Kongaika, 3 years with the airlines, began by poking a bit of fun of the way Talivakaola has used his flying benefits,

> I was always jealous of Talivakaola. I always see him, and his wife take weekend trips [*laughter in the group*] ...my wife and I are planning our first international trip once the travel restrictions end. We are going to try and go to the Philippines...This will be the first

> trip where me and my wife will take where we don't necessarily have immediate family at our travel destination.

The ability to create learning experiences through flying will be discussed more in a later chapter, but the focus on the creation of new experiences by visiting different parts of the world is an example of expanding vā. Tongans in the airlines can experience the world that can go beyond a book or travel guide. I've heard many of my Tongan co-workers who have children share how they have found ways to make their children's material from school come to life by taking them to places their kids are learning about. During a section of U.S. History, I've known of Tongans in the airlines taking their children to DCA (Washington D.C., U.S.). Projects related to countries in the world, a parent took their kid to CDG (Paris, FR). My son had a year-long section about Aotearoa (also known as New Zealand) and the Māori people, so I took him to AKL (Auckland, New Zealand). Mateaki shared, "A lot of our travel has been for family purposes, birthdays, baptisms, weddings, funerals and stuff like that..." There are profound learning experiences of Tongan rituals that occur at these significant events of birthdays, weddings, funerals, etc. Some examples are the recognition and importance of the matriarchal system of the fahu (father's eldest sister and her lineage), the giving of koloa, the wearing of ta'ovala and keikei (Tongan attire), and hair cutting ceremonies to name a few. Continuing on from Mateaki's previous remarks, "...but the memories you're able to make with your kids just traveling to have some family time...you're grateful for the opportunities to create those memories."

Making memories for Tongans in the airlines doesn't become a personal experience to be hoarded, but those memories are shared with others and may become part of their memories. It can become their point of reference, and the possibility of making those memories a lived experience. Lana Lopesi, a Sāmoan contemporary artist and scholar, discusses her concept of

Moana Cosmopolitan, which means that one is locally grounded in Oceania, while being physically, intellectually, and digitally mobile (Tecun, 2020). Lopesi shares ways in which Moana peoples create their identities, as well as what it means to her to be part of the Moana Cosmopolitan,

> Building their identities in relation to them (Black and Indigenous communities overseas), but also in relation to other diasporic communities...I think of someone like myself who is so specifically local, yet I have so many influences all over the place within my body. I hold the tensions of what it means to be a Pacific person in 2020...It has these two elements, one is it allows us to be multilayered and complicated, and it also acknowledges the way in which we are a part of this global world (Tecun, 2020, 19:40; 24:36; 25:01).

Connecting these acts of making memories by Tongans in the airlines, it connects well with Lopesi's concept of being a part of the Moana Cosmopolitan. Although Lopesi discusses much of being mobile through a digital perspective, she also states how Moana peoples can also be physically mobile. That mobility expands the notions of vā and the making of memories, or marking memories, are moments in time that can be extended by revisiting these memories through one's own thoughts, in talanoa with others, and/or physically going to the locations to be reminded of those memories. Although these memories happened at specific times and places, the memories are extended each time they are shared. These memories that are created from Tongans navigating or voyaging through the skies, bring knowledge that contributes to the community that is part of the Moana Cosmopolitan and in many ways are seen as koloa that holds meaning and purpose. These then become the creations of new beats and rhythms in new spaces and reveals the knowledge that comes from the *undercurrents*.

Airport city codes, booking flights, navigating the airline employee seniority system, exploring airports, seeking new routes, absorbing time, and making memories were all woven together within this chapter. All these aspects (and more) were able to describe how Tongans in

the airlines understand, learn and voyage through the skyscape. This helped primarily focus on skyscape, while also opening other themes to explore in upcoming chapters.

CHAPTER 6: UNDERCURRENTS

In this chapter, I will discuss the subversive ways of the undercurrents found, created, and utilized by Tongans in the airline industry. Through this process I will help demonstrate how some of the educational tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) weave in well with the undercurrents. The CRT tenets of challenging traditional or dominant discourse will be reflected, as well as the important factor validating the experiential knowledge of the Tongan airline workers highlighted in this chapter.

SCHOOL V. WORK

'Otukolo Saltiban (2012) shared data that demonstrated, "a significant percentage of Tongan students (just over 70 percent) graduating from high school" in Utah (p. 6). However, she later shares more data from Thomas Maloney in 2007 that 6 percent of Tongan residents in Utah [between 25-34 years old] have completed their bachelor's degree compared to the 9 percent of the total U.S. Tongan population. As shared earlier in a previous chapter, it's noted that the national percentage of the U.S. Tongan population earning their bachelor's degree rose to 13 percent, but still well below the national average of 28 percent (EPIC, 2014). Tongans in Utah have a high percentage graduating from high school and very little transitioning into colleges and universities. This may be similar and true of other Tongans in the U.S. when recognizing the low national percentage rate of Tongans earning their bachelor's degree. If Tongans in the U.S. are not continuing their tertiary schooling after high school, Tongans must be going somewhere. The question then is where?

Nau began her group talanoa session with her two brothers, her husband and me by giving some context of the beginning of her time with the airlines.

"The airline was my first job out of high school. I chose the airlines over schooling, and at first my dad hated that..." Nau chuckles.

"Until he started flying, huh?", I questioned while laughing.

"Yeah! At first, I thought I was working there for the flight benefits, but 14 years later, I'm still here." Nau stated.

"Jaaaammmn[7]!" Sefo shouted.

"I know!" Nau exclaimed.

"Daaaang cuhz[8], 14 years!" Mateaki jokingly remarked.

Laughter from the group.

Nau then clarified, "Well, it wasn't consecutive years, I left on a mission [church service] and after two years they hired me back on. I've been there ever since, and my parents have enjoyed the benefits way more than I have."

Pauliasi Pikula, now 17 years with the airlines, also describes what he did after high school. As I shared in an earlier chapter, Nau, 'Ofa and myself were all part of the same graduating class from the same high school. Pauliasi graduated from another Utah high school, but also graduated the same year as us. In his group talanoa, Pauliasi shared,

> When I first got on [with the airlines], David's [Pikula] dad, my uncle, got me on and I got on at 18 [years of age]. I got a job just to get a job, but 15 years later I look back and I can be grateful that I was able to stay on and keep this job. The airline is the talk of Utah, and everyone knows that if you can get on the airlines, you've pretty much made it.

Nau and Pauliasi both discussed how entering the labor force was their transition stage after high school. One can look at the effects of Tongans in the U.S. (and more broadly Moana peoples) K-

[7] Utah Tongan vernacular at play instead of saying the term damn
[8] Utah Tongan vernacular (dang instead of damn, and cuh/cuhz/cuz related to urban/Crip culture Tongans were exposed to when immigrated to the U.S.)

12 experience to better understand the reasons why many are not furthering their education into a college/university after high school graduation. Other factors that also may need to be visited are one's socio-economic status, parental/guardian educational attainment, access, and resources available to assist one to enter tertiary schooling, etc. Pauliasi also mentioned that "The airline is the talk of Utah," which he is primarily referring to the Tongan community in Utah. The experience from Tongans in the airline's spreads to family and friends from the community, and the desire to work in the airlines, as well as the know-how is shared to help other Tongans gain access to airline employment. In a way, this connection is a type of undercurrent. However, it is important to recognize the trend of entering the workforce as an option Tongans in the U.S. have and are taking post high school.

In Utah, Pacific Islanders make up 0.96 percent of the labor force (Vaughn, Fitisemanu, Hafoka & Folau, 2020).

Unfortunately, there isn't any disaggregated data available to see Tongans specifically within this Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander category (see Table 2). The data also doesn't elaborate on details of the labor (part-time/full-time employment, benefited position or no benefits, etc.). Another unique perspective to consider are the possibilities for the 'undercurrent' labor that may not be accounted for such as self-employed work (landscaping, concrete, food vendors, photographers/videographers, artists, etc.). However, this data does display that the Transportation Industry, which the airline is a part of, is the top field that employs Pacific Islanders in the state of Utah. It also shows how this industry is one of the highest paid jobs Pacific Islanders are employed in earning an average monthly salary of $3,411.

Table 4
Top 5 Fields that Employ Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders in Utah

Field	Number of Jobs	Average Monthly Salary
1. Transportation and Warehouse	1,753	$3,411
2. Manufacturing	1.535	$3,912
3. Healthcare	1.518	$2,733
4. Administrative Support and Waste Management	1,478	$2,686
5. Accommodations and Food Services	1,019	$1,669

(Department of Workforce Services, 2019)

This brings some clarity as to an option of what Pacific Islanders in Utah are engaging in outside of tertiary schooling. Ryan Tu‘akoi, 12 years with the airlines, was born and raised in San Mateo, California and began his career in the airlines at SFO (San Francisco, CA, U.S.). A few years ago, Ryan decided to transfer stations and move with his family to continue his career in SLC (Salt Lake City, UT, U.S.). Ryan shared with his talanoa group some of his initial thoughts and insights regarding Tongans in the airlines that stemmed from the time he was a child,

> My experience being a Tongan in the airline industry started because I had a lot of relatives growing up who were in the airlines. I fed off of that. When they would go to sports events, I would see them in their uniforms. Growing up I felt that was a career path and profession for Polynesians. In San Francisco, it was kind of like, ‘Oh, if you’re not going to school, not going to do this, you go into the airline industry.’ And they’d be so positive about the experience because of the traveling and providing for your family. It [the airlines] was such a good light for them, that’s why I decided to go into the airlines.

Ryan describes a common understanding of how Tongans in the U.S. have come to view the airlines, a positive workplace and good opportunity to earn an income that will allow one to take care of themself and their family. Many in the talanoa groups discussed how they’ve been able to be financially stable and have enough to provide for their immediate and future needs. Ryan also

describes an aspect of undercurrent connections. He learned about the airline industry from his relatives that worked in the airlines. This was a sense of an access point and an opportunity to be with family in the workplace. The undercurrents reveal the importance of Moana peoples and their familial ties. Lio Pupunu, 15 years with the airlines, included a unique perspective that continued with others in the various talanoa groups. He shared,

"You know the reason why I got the [airline] job is because I wanted to be the favorite son. Because your parents get to fly."

Mafi interrupted and said, "You're still not the favorite son."

"I guess I'm still not the favorite son," Lio jokingly replied.

Laughter from the group.

"But I got on there so that my mom could fly. My dad passed away, but I always wanted to make sure that my mom could get to different places and see all her grandkids. I had the benefits for her, so I was the favorite son. All my siblings were living in different places like Northern California, Los Angeles, Utah and Reno and my mom could see them all at any time." Lio explained.

In an interaction between Toa Palu, 10 years with the airlines and began her career in DFW (Dallas Ft Worth, TX, U.S.) before transferring to SLC a few years ago, and Josephine Akoula, 12 years with the airlines and someone that currently manages over hundreds of employees within her department, both shared their experiences of how their parents now view them as airline workers. Toa started out by sharing,

> Growing up my parents always wanted us to be something big when we grew up, like a doctor or lawyer. My mom was talking one day, because she had met up with a friend that we grew up with. She said that her son had just became a lawyer and the daughter just finished nursing school, and my kids aren't really doing anything. I told her, 'But I work at the airlines.' My mom said that I was right. That's way better than being a doctor

> or lawyer because I get to fly for free. You know what, next time I'm going to brag about you. And I said thank you.

Josephine added,

> I actually was...how would you say it, disowned?! Because I had made a life decision that my parents disliked. It was to the point, 'Can someone tell that girl...'. But as soon as I got a job with the airlines, it was like, 'Where's my first-born daughter? How is she doing? Does she need a babysitter?' and my siblings were like all she needed to do was get a job with the airlines and she became the number one child. She went from being disowned to being the number one child.

As the group slowly calmed down from laughing, I mentioned to the group that this was all fascinating for me to hear because, unlike the majority (if not all) of my co-workers, my parents do not use their flying benefits that often. I can count on my hands the number of times they've used their flying privileges over the past 10 years of my employment. I also want to bring up the ways in which many of us in our talanoa groups, as expressed in these recent talanoa vignettes and past ones too, the use and practice of fakaoli and fakakata, Tongan humor/joking around. Saka Ma'asi, 3 years with the airlines, shared his understanding of the Tongan people, "We're loud. Anywhere we are at, especially at work, you can hear from another room a Tongan laughing. When there's a lot of us [Tongans], it makes it fun at work." The use of Tongan humor can be seen as a form of the undercurrent as it helps mediate relations and can bring a sense of humility into a talanoa. Using this in talanoa, Melenaite Taumoefolau (2012), a Tongan linguist scholar, writes, "humility is greatly valued in Tongan culture and people who use lea fakatōkilalo/faka'aki'akimui in their speech are regarded as poto he anga '*cleaver in behaving*'" (p. 357). Taumoefolau translates lea fakatōkilalo as a more humiliative way of talking that Tongans use and has the purpose of expressing respect. Lea fakatōkilalo "deliberately uses words and expressions that lower himself/herself in order to elevate the addressee or audience...fakatōkilalo literally means to let [oneself] fall down." (Taumoefolau, 2012, p. 353).

As Tongans use lea fakatōkilalo, there are usually power dynamics where the addressee or audience has status and to continue to elevate their status, lea fakatōkilalo is an art of speaking that demonstrates respect and humility. This practice seems to take on a more nuanced approach with Tongans here in the U.S. There may not necessarily be someone with status as part of a talanoa, but when one decides to lea fakatōkilalo within a talanoa, it still helps show respect to those engaged in the talanoa. It also helps them recognize that the individual is poto he anga. Adding in fakaoli and/or fakakata brings laughter into the space. That helps bring a level of comfort to those involved and may allow others to join in the talanoa sooner than later.

Tongans in the airlines receive praise and acceptance within their jobs and careers, however, there are still the tensions that Tongans in the U.S. still are navigating similar to what Nau and Toa shared in particular with their experiences and decisions of school and the airlines. Is going into the workforce good enough after high school? Does one still need to go to college/university to further their schooling?

Alexander Fiefia, 14 years with the airlines, John Mahe, 8 years with the airlines, and June Fiefia, 5 years with the airlines, all were able to discuss within their respective talanoa groups some of the tensions between working for the airlines and balancing or trying to fit school in their life. Alexander expressed,

> I think working at the airlines for Tongans has status. It's a coveted job. Out of high school, I had aspirations to go on my [church service] mission, come back from mission, and go to school. I honestly wanted to become a math teacher and someday teach math in college somewhere. I came back from my mission, I was working a security job and trying to go to school. I then got on the airlines. Before I got on the airlines, my mom would always ask when I was going to complete school? What I wanted to do afterwards? She knew I wanted to finish school. But as soon as I got hired on to the airlines, those questions stopped. It was as if she had hit the lottery. Now she could fly where she wants. We never had flying benefits growing up. My dad would always do construction jobs and my mom was a seamstress. So, I never flew on a plane until I was 14, and the second time was on my mission. We never flew anywhere. We always drove if we needed to travel. So, as soon as I got on with the airlines, my mom stopped asking

> me about school. I remember about a year and half into the airlines, I told her (because I was married, and we were having our first kid) that I was going to quit the airlines and go back to school. And she told me why? Because at the time we weren't making a lot of money...my mom told me not to worry about it, anytime you need money, just ask. So for a time she was helping us financially. At the time, I realized that for my mom and my dad, flying was more important than an education.

Alexander's desire to attend school and earn a degree was always a goal he had since he was able to envision his future. As he reached that dilemma and crossroads in life where he had to choose whether to continue his schooling pursuits or take on a different path of education, the acceptance of his mother (similar to what Lio, Josephine and many others in the talanoa groups expressed) was a moment of realization for Alexander that working for the airlines would be the path in which he would continue his learning and expand his knowledge within the realm of the airlines. Within the airlines, one can become educated on processes and procedures to be safe in the workplace, trained properly to operate heavy machinery, fixing and upkeep of aircrafts to safely transport passengers and cargo, assisting passengers to have a smooth and seamless flying experience, dealing with unexpected events, scheduling, and organizing people and loads, etc. As I think about many that have pursued and continued their schooling into college/university, myself included, for Tongans (and other Moana peoples) the pursuit of a degree is not an individualistic aspiration. It is driven by the support of family and friends. It's the desire to attain knowledge and/or a skill for the family to benefit from and enhance their lives. During Alexander's dilemma, he immediately recognized that being in the airlines was another way of fulfilling that desire of what a degree could provide for his family, but in a way that could be had instantaneously and a more certain outcome.

In June's talanoa group, which also included John, he shared similar sentiments as Alexander (who is his older brother) in trying to complete school but found his way to the

airlines. Later in the talanoa, John share's his experience as someone who has completed a degree and continuing to work in the airlines. June shared,

> Realizing my older siblings did not complete their schooling motivated me to try and finish college. I moved away from Salt Lake to pursue my degree and not worry about family obligations. However, I found myself getting a job in the airlines for six months before moving to the airline company with my brother. I'm close to finishing and I'm still planning on finishing, but it's been kind of hard because working here has become more of a priority than school.

June shows how schooling is still important to him and recognizes that many others in the airlines are still on that trajectory of completing their schooling process. June was one of many that I've had conversations with, throughout the years, that are hoping to still find their way back to school for security purposes. Meaning, if anything happened where the airlines were no longer an option, the completion of school will still allow them to find work without having to start over.

John expanded on his experience pursuing his degree,

> I finished my schooling (bachelor's degree) before I started with the current airline we're working at now. But when I was with the previous airline I worked for, I was actually working and still going to school. Anyways, the perspective as I moved on to this airline and the effect it had on me, as far as education, it taught me to ask myself what kind of job do I really want? People can say, I'm an accountant, and that sounds fancy, it makes you feel like you have some type of power to say you're an accountant or a business analyst. But at the end of the day, is the job actually fun? Does it give you the freedom to actually be with your family? To have enough money because sometimes you don't need a lot of money. Does it allow you to enjoy time? Some companies say they're diverse, but when you work there, you don't really feel it. Even in these tech companies, the majority of their management is white. I can see Polynesians and specifically Tongans are making their way up in the airlines locally. That's pretty cool...as far as degrees and how that may help others here at the airlines, that's great. But at the end of the day, I feel like people are just staking up degrees and not focusing on what they really want out of a job? As long as I stay in my lane, I'm good.

John challenges these notions of school being the best decision in moving ahead in life. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in business but has recognized how he has enjoyed his time in the airlines and that it has been a space and place he feels seen. It's a work environment where

it's diverse and where he sees potential in upward mobility within leadership. I've come to understand how schooling and education are not the same thing, even though they both have similarities and may inform one another. Education encompasses schooling but schooling only encapsulates part of education. Schooling is a pursuit that one participates in to gain credentials for a job or a better job. That is the end goal. Education is striving for liberation, learning wherever and whenever possible, and a mindfulness of quality of life and well-being. John's comparison of other jobs and companies he's been a part of in relation to his experience in the airlines helps describe a sense of belonging that he feels. There is much literature within education that describes the need for different racial groups to be reflected within a space to have an environment that allows for confidence to speak and participate (Alcantar, Kim, Hafoka & Teranishi, 2020; Hafoka et al, 2020; Lonzo, 2010; Museus, Yi & Saelua, 2016; Jones, 1999; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). As a Tongan, John shared the need for representation in leadership. Again, these are ways to be seen in a workplace and have leadership that can connect to those that have similar lived experiences. He also comes to challenge views of the accumulation of money and time being spent away from activities and people that we may prioritize in our lives.

In a previous occasion in which I had a talanoa with Alexander while working, we were both in an aircraft bin unloading bags from an inbound flight. He mentioned to me that although he was all for furthering one's schooling, he couldn't imagine being in school and in debt. For Alexander, the airlines had given him steady income, time to be with his family, travel opportunities, and he and his wife were able to purchase a home. Student debt has affected opportunities of making major life choices such as moving out of parents' home, buying a car, postponing having children, and buying a home (Baum & Saunders, 1998).

In the previous chapter, I shared how there are many Tongans that are doing school, including myself, and that all of us still seek ways to make the airlines continue to be a part of our lives. I've been asked on numerous occasions if I will leave the airlines once I graduate? Without hesitation I say no, but of course it would depend on what lies ahead in life for my family and me. The flying benefits would be hard to give up, but it's the people and relationships that exist within the airlines that I experience and hear from others that brings people back. It is the spaces of Tongans and the other Moana peoples within the airlines where we've found each other in the cracks of our fragmented world, the undercurrents. As I've experienced being in the airlines and in continual conversation with my Tongan co-workers, and other Tongans and Moana peoples in the airlines, people still show value to both the working life in the airlines and the pursuit of school. Very few seem to value one more than the other. I have seen on many occasions where Tongans have decided to pass on applying to college/university and enter the workforce, especially if they begin their career within the airlines. However, I noticed that Tongans have decided to return to school or give school a try after getting a job after high school. Their reasoning was recognizing that other Tongans at work were able to further their education in school while holding on to their job in the airlines at the same time. Other reasons shared by those returning/going to school were wanting to try something new, gaining an interest in a skill/knowledge that wasn't there after high school graduation, motivation from a spouse or someone with close relations, recognizing that upward mobility would be helpful if a degree was earned, and proving to themselves they could attain a degree. One of my Samoan co-workers once shared with me his support and excitement of me graduating with a doctoral degree. Those around us in the breakroom all nodded, smiled, and showed their support for me, too. It was a special and unique moment that I will always remember, especially because the next thing that

same coworker had said to me following his sentiments of support, “I never thought in my life I would be able to say to a doctor, ‘hey doctor, get your butt up into the bin and stack those bags’”. All of us in the breakroom that moment all broke out into loud laughter. For Tongans in the airlines, we’ve come to recognize the airlines are a place to work hard, earn a livable wage, receive benefits to fly, build community, and even with all the navigating and voyaging of the skies, the airlines are also a place that keeps one grounded because of the relations nurtured there.

FLEXIBILITY: CREATION OF SKILLS, TALENTS, AND ACCESS

> The airline industry was described by someone as the ‘golden handcuffs’ because once you get in, you kind of don’t want to go work anywhere else. You love the perks, and you love flying around for free. - Tevita Maumau

As someone who traveled back and forth from LAX (Los Angeles, CA, U.S.) and SLC consistently for 4 years, I was always asked how was that possible? How could someone like myself be in school full-time, raise a family together with my wife, support my wife in her pursuits as a classically trained painter, work multiple jobs for more streams of income, and work one of those jobs in a different state? There is no easy answer or response that can fully describe how my wife and I have been able to navigate the ways in which we exist and move along life. However, there have been examples shared thus far on how many Tongans in the airlines have been able to continue being employed with the airlines and finding ways to complete school. The flexibility that is allowed within the airlines gives many employees the opportunity to travel as well as find other interests to pursue. As I shared in an earlier chapter, the flexibility exists for many to give away, trade, and/or pick up shifts from other co-workers if that process is properly completed through company policies and procedures. An employee can give their shift(s) away to someone else looking for extra hours to work. This can benefit both

employees as one is seeking for more hours to work to earn more monetary gain needed for personal needs and wants, and the other may need to give away their shifts due to school, another job, and/or just needing a break from work to rest and complete other responsibilities. Trading shifts also allows for flexibility as employees seek to still earn their monthly wages, but also get certain time off that may be needed to travel and/or fulfill other obligations. Senituli Loamanu, 7 years with the airlines, shared his final thoughts related to flexibility at the end of his talanoa group,

> One thing I remember hearing from my grandparents was tokanga ki he lotu, tokanga ki he ngaue, tokanga ki hoʻo ako pea tokangaʻi ho fāmili [*focus on church, focus on work, focus on your studies and take care of your family*]. With the airlines, we're able to complete all four of these points. Working for the airlines, we have the freedom to choose our own schedule in comparison to other jobs.

Choosing our own schedule allows another layer of flexibility that Senituli points out that may not be readily understood when compared to other jobs. When considering flexibility for a job, one typically may think about time off opportunities (hours per shift, days off, vacation, paid time off, holidays, etc.). Expectations of airline workers through the industry is to work the schedule and shift one chooses (morning, afternoon, evening, or graveyard). However, through the flexibility of shift swapping in the airlines, Tongans have used this privilege to 'choose' or adjust their work schedule to fulfill fatongia. This approach is different from standard industry/company expectations of work scheduling, which is done by employees independently and then approved by management. Pulu shares,

> Us Tongans, us Polys[9], things come up all the time. And I think we love the flexibility of this job to give away a shift. If you don't want to work today, give it away, especially if I need to be in another state. I can jump on a plane and give a shift. Or 40 hours a week is not going to cut it, so I need more hours and I can pick up a shift.

[9] Poly or Polys is a shortened way to say Polynesians

The movement of shifts to ‘choose’ one's schedule adds on more labor to the employee, especially because the employee should be active and available to communicate with co-workers to seek out the best swaps that would be beneficial for both parties. Once a clear understanding of swapping shifts is learned and relationships are built, the process becomes more feasible and manageable for airline employees. The flexibility Pulu brings up is the need for Tongans in the airlines to have that option to fulfill fatongia. Although the focus thus far has been on seeking time off to fulfill fatongia, being at work also allows opportunities for Tongans in the airlines to still complete one’s fatongia. Working to earn monetary gain is already a given to help supplement the needs and wants for an airline worker, however, Tongans use work as an opportunity to operate within the undercurrents. With so many family and community connections that are at work, and opportunities to tauhi vā with one another in between flights, the workplace becomes a community space. There have been many times Tongans in the airlines have used those work opportunities to plan events (birthdays, trips, sporting events, community functions, family gatherings, etc.), consuming cultural food items and imbibing the fonua (potlucks, special occasions, holidays for those that must work, etc.), completing schoolwork, organizing finances and paying bills, and especially staying connected with family and community through meaningful talanoa. This allows Tongans after work to not only leave work when clocking out, but more time is available for personal needs, family, rest, and/or other fatongia that could not be completed while at work.

In that same talanoa session with Pulu, Alexander asked Tevita a question regarding a decision he made regarding his employment status, “Was there ever a time that you regret quitting your supervisor position at your other job?”

Tevita responded,

> Nah, never. I've never had the feeling here in the airlines where I just hate going to work. I felt that all the time at my other job. I'm not sure if it was the pressure or other stuff we did, and yeah, we all have our days that we could sleep forever and experience the normal gripe we'd have with any other job. But there's a feeling I'll never have at this job, I know I won't, that I had while working my other job.

Tevita shared that he received good pay at his other job because he was a supervisor. He had worked there for many years and kept his part-time position with the airlines. As soon as Tevita received full-time employment with the airlines, he submitted his two weeks' notice at his other job to take a slight pay cut (for the time being) to be with the airlines. Over time, there are pay increases that typically happen on an annual basis with the airlines and Tevita mentioned that he would eventually make more than his previous employment. In Tevita's response to Alexander, he never really focused on the pay, but the feeling he had while working both jobs. The monetary compensation and leadership title were not much of a factor when he decided to leave his other job to go full-time with the airlines. It is very hard to think of a job or career where there is family and the Tongan community. Rather than wait for events to gather and practice culture, it can be done on a more regular and daily basis within the airlines. That is the feeling Tevita has within the airlines and what may have been lacking at his previous job. Shift swapping, fulfilling fatongia, and a work environment that brings good feelings are aspects of the undercurrents and flexibility Tongans in the airlines enjoy. What more can possibly exist that Tongans in the airlines can create?

Misi Taumoepeau, 12 years with the airlines, and Pauli Pekipaki, 13 with the airlines, both began to speak about what I have recognized different streams of the undercurrent Tongans in the airlines utilize to support and help each other. Misi starts off by saying,

> The thing about the airlines is that it doesn't have to be your main thing. The airlines make it to where you could basically make your own schedule. If you find the right people, you work for them, they work for you, and all of a sudden you have the days off that you want. You need that time off, why? There are other things you may want to do.

> Such as a podcast, other businesses, etc. That's the beauty of why I've stayed with the airlines so long is because of the freedom I have to make my own schedule.

Pauli adds on,

> It's definitely that flexibility that you talk about Misi, especially because you are a filmmaker. We stay in the airlines because it pays good money, we stay because we can stay connected not just locally but globally, and we stay because of the community that's created there...but the different networks that are available because we all work at the airlines. We all have something else going on, 'Inoke you're doing your school, Misi you produced and edited a recent documentary, and so on. It's funny because I've been asked here at work by some co-workers if I know anyone that does landscaping? I mention to them that I do landscaping, but then they respond that I'm always at work. I tell them I can NOT be here to do the landscaping job.
>
> *Laughter from the group.*
>
> And then they ask if I know anyone that does tile work? Oh [mentions Tongan co-worker] does that. Do I know anyone that does concrete? There's like 10 people I know here that do that work. So, it's great that working in the airlines has created a network.

Both Misi and Pauli talk about flexibility, but also the network of skills and knowledge that's been created. If someone requests a specific labor to be done, there are Tongans that have those skills that could be referred to. Misi is one that does film and Pauli, not only does landscaping, but also is a co-host to a Pasifika focused podcast. These skills go beyond what has been discussed about school. There are Tongans in the airlines that also work within the hotel industry, car rentals, auto detailers, graphic designers, video content creators, photographers, videographers, restaurant owners, caterers, realtors, lawyers, medical professionals, and much more. Also, these streams of the undercurrent and networks extend beyond Tongans in the airlines. If a family member or another Tongan in the community has certain skill sets or valued knowledge, they also receive referrals.

There is a level of access that these networks provide and allows for opportunities to be visible, seen and feel needed. Toa shares her experience of coming to recognize access within the airlines,

> I actually never thought I'd work for the airlines. I did not want to be one of those Tongans. I will never work at the airlines. My parents did work there, so we didn't fully understand the draw to work in the airlines. I grew up north of San Francisco and there weren't a lot of Tongans...I finished school, I didn't know what to do, and I needed a job fast. My sister was working in the airlines in reservations. She told me to move over with her, she would help me get on with the airlines, and I could figure out what I wanted to do later. My sister was living in Dallas, so I flew to Dallas, I interviewed, and I got the job. I moved my kids to Dallas, I told myself this was temporary, and I would go to grad school. It's been almost 10 years now, (laughter)...my kids and I took our first international trip. I remember we got first class and we were going to France. I remember they were sitting in the chairs and were about 6 and 7 years old. I almost cried because as a single mom, I knew I could never give my kids that experience. After that, I told myself, I'm done. I'll never leave the airlines. It's been really fulfilling for me and for my kids, too. I never got this when I was young and knowing my current situation, I wouldn't be able to give my kids these experiences. So, to be able to take them to Brazil or Paris, I will lift bags, I will load planes for the rest of my life if my kids could travel the world.

Listening to Toa share her experience of coming into the airlines made me think of access in multiple ways. We've talked about access to tap into networks and the resources that exist through the Tongan community within the airlines, access to time, but Toa brings up access to the Tongan people. She knew that Tongans worked in the airlines, but only until she experienced being an airline worker, could she begin to understand and appreciate the reasons why Tongans continue to stay within the airlines. In the talanoa, she shared that it was challenging, but transferring to SLC, she had that access to the Tongan community that she may have not had in the past. Also, like Ryan's talanoa vignette early in the chapter, she gained access to the airlines through family, her sister. There is no guarantee for someone to get hired on when one refers a family or friend to join them in the airlines, but the access to the knowledge of the hiring process from someone(s) that have gone through it is a big help Tongans have received and followed. Lastly, the access Toa saw and felt by giving, not only herself, but her children the opportunity to see the world. That reflection and experience is a special one that I've had, heard throughout the talanoa sessions, and discussed within the workspace with other Tongan co-workers. These stories are shared even with Tongans that do not work in the airlines. This is a reason why every

hiring opportunity that arises within the airlines, Tongans share these opportunities through text, social media, word of mouth, and there are many Tongans that are hopeful to get the chance to be a part of the Tongan community in the airlines.

The undercurrents in the airline context constitute people and communities that exist underneath the system they work in to survive. The undercurrents are an unintended social phenomenon that is formed in the creation of community through familial and cultural kinship ties, which in this context is the airline industry. Those that work underneath the wings of planes who also get to ride in them, give lift to those flights in their labor, and likewise give lift to their culture through their shared experiences and relationships in this workplace. Tongan's living as Tongans, and in extension Pasifika/Oceanian/Polynesian/Moana peoples living as themselves having made a place to exist as themselves, by arriving together to create a collective that builds off generations of culture making with their shared and adapting language, vernacular, values, and worldviews. A place to learn and grow together as a related people, despite the lack of this intention in the space they do it in.

The beginning of this section, Tevita introduced the concept of the airlines being the ‘golden handcuff’. Throughout this section, I’ve come to understand the ‘handcuff’ as what binds me and other Tongan airline workers to the system, or the mainstream. We become dependent on the need for monetary capital to survive and exist within society. The ‘golden’ part is what allows Tongans in the airlines the ability to change the purpose of that system through the cultural purposes and function through the agency of employees. It offers flexibility to explore other opportunities that allow for reflection of how one determines a comfortable quality of life and well-being. It is a lifestyle of travel that otherwise may not be attainable. The golden is what exists in the undercurrents.

CHAPTER 7: WORKPLACE EPISTEMOLOGIES

The first time I ever heard the word epistemology was during my first year of my master's program at the University of Utah. I had just connected with a cousin that was in his first year of his doctorate studies, but also in my same program (Education, Culture & Society [ECS]). It was a feeling of relief to have a relative in graduate school at the same time to share space and navigate this process together. I needed a course to enroll in and my cousin mentioned taking a course with him. The course was on Testimonio and Chicana/Latina Feminist Epistemologies. I was hesitant to take the course mainly because I was not confident at the time in my intellectual ability to comprehend and contribute to discussions around feminism, let alone Chicana/Latina feminist worldviews. But also, the word 'epistemologies' was a term I had never heard of which then made the whole course topic even more intimidating for me. However, I am grateful for taking the course and engaging with the material given to help expand my knowledge to relate, respect, and give the much-needed attention to the women and their lived experiences that were shared in the course.

I came to understand that epistemology is related to knowledge, knowing, and understanding. It allows for experiences to help inform ourselves and others to make sense and give meaning through the production of knowledge, and how we come to know. Manulani Aluli Meyer, an Indigenous scholar from the sands of Mokapu and Kailua beach in Hawai'i, describes epistemology through a Hawaiian perspective (Keyele, 2010) as:

- Mana'o Lana: ideas that are knowledge and separate from our knowing - one may have been aware of these ideas, but have not yet experienced them (floating knowledge)

- Mana‘o ‘I‘o: meaning that knowledge that becomes knowing because it has been experienced (experiential knowledge)
- Aloha: a type of knowing that leads to understanding, service to others (intelligence)

Knowledge is important to have, especially if the opportunity may not allow for knowledge to transform into experiential knowledge. Knowing occurs when one embodies the experience to learn through doing. Lastly, intelligence takes knowing to a place of understanding through relationships (connection). Intelligence leads one to relate better with one another and other relations, place, and the world. It brings awareness and mindfulness to our surroundings. These aspects of Hawaiian epistemology also reminded me of Tongan educational concepts of ako (*to teach/to learn*), ‘ilo (*to know/to experience/to recognize*) and poto (*to be clever and skillful/to understand and do*) (Thaman, 1995). Konai Helu Thaman (2003), a Tongan education scholar, describes these important Tongan concepts as necessary in the push to decolonizing educational spaces. She continues by stating that this process, 1) acknowledges and recognizes the dominance of western philosophy, 2) valuing alternative ways of thinking about the world, particularly those rooted in the Indigenous cultures of Moana peoples, and 3) opportunities to develop a new philosophy of education that is culturally inclusive and gender sensitive (Thaman, 2003). These epistemologies are some ways in which I seek to further uncover Tongan epistemology that exist within the workplace of the airlines.

My approach to this chapter comes through the knowing and understanding from those that have participated in this research, including myself, and our experiences within the workplace of the airlines. The previous two analysis chapters discussed ways in which Tongans in the airlines use their benefits to travel and become voyagers of skyscapes, and how the undercurrents exist within the airlines to allow Tongans to carve out space to thrive in and

beyond the airlines. In this chapter, I will explore, examine, self-reflect and process how Tongans understand the workplace in the airlines as an alternative temporal and spatial place of learning. This chapter will focus on two main areas of the workplace - the breakroom (the space to rest between job responsibilities) and the ramp (where the various aspects of the work happen). These two temporal and spatial locations are the moments and areas where Tongan knowledge production in the airlines exists, is created, and observed through ako, ‘ilo and poto (Māhina, 2007).

BREAKROOM

Once one passes through the employee security, the locker room and/or breakroom are typically the next stops. One meets up with fellow co-workers, prepares for the workday by putting on proper attire (safety vest, knee pads, steel/composite toe shoes, gloves, etc.), storing away lunch (if one was brought in), and finding a space to return to when break times are provided between flight responsibilities. For many Tongans, it may be typical to congregate with other Tongan and Moana co-workers in the breakroom area or other open areas available throughout the airport. These are the spaces that are carved out to break bread, take note of cultural/community gatherings happening away from work, find out tips regarding information and knowledge in the undercurrents, connect with family and friends, and plan opportunities to connect outside of the workplace. Also, it’s an opportunity to engage with one's cultural identity because there are other Tongans present that have a certain understanding of shared behavior and values.

In this section, there will be discussions that one could typically engage in within the breakroom (or other designated areas where Tongans congregate for break time away from work). The focus will be on the construct of race by Tongans in the airlines, as well as Tongan

cultural knowledge and production. The breakroom is the space where race is processed through talanoa, and the later section on labor is where race is learned through the body in comparison to words. This is vital as this discussion gives a glimpse to how Tongans in the airlines are navigating the industry, but also figuring out life through racialized perspectives that may be critical or not. The fact that Tongans gather primarily with one another or with other Moana co-workers demonstrates how this act of coming together in the workplace contributes (un)knowingly to their racialization. This will also help give more context on how race is understood and plays out within the workplace. Lastly, Tongan culture will be a major topic shared, and how this is learned, produced, and practiced by Tongans in the airlines in various aspects of the workplace. seek

Identity

Race is socially constructed in different ways dependent on context. In Utah, the U.S. history of racial formation through colonialism, policy, law, and incarceration is layered with religious nuances of divinely created constructs of race as well. Moana people are often racialized as Brown migrants in a settler colonial nation under already established categories by the state, society, and legacies of being possessed by whiteness; and, as a 'chosen people' who are considered 'fallen' by the dominant religious ideologies in Utah (Aikau, 2012; Arvin, 2019; Hernandez, 2021; Omi and Winant, 1994; Tecun, Fehoko, and Hafoka, 2021). Additionally, dominant right-wing conservatism in Utah frames any discussion on race as taboo, seeing public discourses of race as insinuating racism itself, which influences a culture of caution or hesitancy regarding race. However, with reciprocal relations built through common lived experiences shared amongst Tongan airline workers, topics like race can be openly discussed, often without any apprehension. Also, these common lived experiences are what tends to attract Tongans to

one another at work. In a way, gathering as Tongans in a shared space is a precursor to recognize how racialization has already taken place, and that this act of gathering may contribute to the dialogue around the construction of race by Tongans in the airlines. The understanding of race amongst Tongans is important as this helps better recognize ways in which Tongans in the airlines view and situate themselves within the industry and within our larger society.

Talivakaola and Dan Moleni (who are also brothers-in-law, Talivakaola married Dan's younger sister) both shared how they have come to understand what it means to be Tongan. Talivakaola begins by saying,

> Growing up here in the states, you grow up with your ethnicity as Tongan, but you don't really know what that really means. Unless you get the chance to go back to the islands to see where our forefathers came from. When my dad sent me back [for school], I thought I was Tongan Tongan. I'm a Tongan from Utah. And then when I went back, I realized I'm not even that Tongan. Comparing myself to those born and raised in Tonga, I recognized what it means to be Tongan. I started to pick up on cultural things, like saying 'tulou' [pardon, excuse, to go in between]. I was shocked to see, when I went to Tonga, how Americanized I was and how I thought I was Tongan, but I really wasn't. I had to learn it.

Dan continued by sharing,

> It's different how you all see being Tongan because y'all were born in the U.S. and then went to Tonga. For me, I'm half Tongan. My father is Tongan, and my mother is Hawaiian and Caucasian. My dad met my mom in college at Church College in Hawai'i, got married, moved to Tonga, and had all nine of us. I'm from a family of nine kids and I'm number eight in the family. Growing up in Tonga, I knew I was somewhat Tongan because my dad was Tongan. I grew up in an environment with other Tongans, but a little bit inside of me, I wasn't fully there because I'm half. Inside of my household I learned English, and everything outside of the home, I learned everything I should know that's Tongan. I learned how to fakakata, basically joking around. I learned about the putu [funerals] and the way things are done. I learned about the different [social class/rank] status. There's a Tu'i, the king, and the ways you approach him. There are the hou'eiki, those that are nobles, and there are the kakai, the commoners. Learning these things, I felt like it was important to know about being a Tongan. However, when I moved to the U.S., things were a lot different. I lived in Tonga, but people wouldn't say they were Tongan. Until I moved out of Tonga, I was surrounded by so many different ethnicities and so many different people, to identify as Tongan was a little different for me. There was now a sense of pride because I really felt like I was Tongan. The things I was raised on were Tongan values like respect, faka'apa'apa. Other ethnicities would always say that

> Tongans always had respect for elders...that's what made it easy for others to identify me as Tongan and that's something I was proud of because others recognized that of me.

In listening to both Talivakaola and Dan, I recognized that they both understood the categorization of Tongans here in the U.S. as an ethnicity. However, in the workplace, Tongans in the airlines have referred to Tongans as a racial group rather than an ethnicity, or race and ethnicity are used interchangeably. To help conceptualize the meanings of the two terms, the construct of race began by being tied to one's physical features and characteristics, and ethnicity is related to recognizing the differences amongst groups of people due to their language and culture. If Tongans in the airlines understand themselves within the category of race, then we can better decipher the formation of race by the nation-state. Talivakaola described the differences in how his identity of being a Tongan is different in the motherland when compared to his experience being part of the U.S. diaspora. He didn't have to question his identity as a Tongan in the U.S. but questioned it when he went to live and study in Tonga. Also, Talivakaola refers to his nationality as a U.S. citizen when making the comparison with his Tongan ethnic identity. When Dan describes his hyper awareness of being Tongan in the U.S. when compared to his upbringing in Tonga, it reminded me of how one comes to identify oneself as a Tongan based on where they may be geographically located, and in proximity to other Tongans. For example, when a Tongan is in Tonga, the way one may identify themself is through their family clan, village, or region. However, this doesn't negate Tongans in Tonga identifying as Tongan because this identity is emphasized through schooling, laws, and within church culture. When moved outside of the motherland to another Moana nation, territory, or state, that person becomes more aware of being Tongan. When moved towards the West side of the continental U.S., that person becomes a Pacific Islander or a more common term used is Polynesian (unless there is a large concentration of Tongans, then they still may be Tongan). When moved to the East side of the

continental U.S., that person becomes Brown or mistaken for being part of another race and/or ethnicity.

The term Polynesian, or 'Poly' for short, has become a racialized term and is a way many in the talanoa groups referred to themselves and their co-workers, too. For many in the talanoa groups, to just talk about their Tongan identity was a bit challenging for some due to the ways in which Tongans have been clumped together with other Moana peoples as Polynesian (even those of Melanesian and Micronesian descent). For many, Polynesian has been understood as all the people in Oceania and encompasses all Moana peoples, however, this internalized notion displays a lack of context and knowledge available to fully comprehend the marginalization of Moana peoples within the Melanesian and Micronesian groupings. This reflects Arvin's (2019) argument of how Polynesians are possessed by whiteness, and thus come to stand in as the representation of the Moana.

Another important aspect that both Talivakaola and Dan alluded to regarding Tonga as motherland is how they both expressed their personal thoughts that it signifies the 'standard' for what it means to be Tongan. This is fascinating because Tonga has been greatly influenced by outside systems, ideas, and powers. Tonga is continually changing, and more Tongans currently reside outside of Tonga than within it. This frozen/static measure of authenticity seems to reflect colonial logic. Also, the mention of being Americanized reflects a U.S. centric view of the Americas and racial assumptions in what America/Americanized refers to (the invisible race of whiteness).

In another talanoa group, Pulu and Tevita shared their thoughts on race and ethnicity and their understanding of those terms in connection to being Tongan,

> I've always identified myself as a Tongan. Even when I go to Tonga, they don't call me Palangi [primarily referred to a white person amongst Tongans in the diaspora, but also is

> understood as a person not born in Tonga]. Maybe because I was born in Hawai‘i, lived there for two years, and then went to Tonga until I was 8 years old, went back to Hawai‘i for a year and then came to Utah. But, yeah, what is a Tongan? I’m Tongan. Tongan first, American second.

Tevita added,

> I’m definitely Tongan. Growing up, I was always proud of the heritage. My parents, like many of us on this call, are first generation here in this country. My parents are from Tonga, and even though I’ve never been to Tonga, I’ve always felt I was Tongan. That was my place and something I was always proud of. However, I know if I go to Tonga, I probably would feel more American...I’m looking at all of us and not all of us married a full Tongan.

Laughter from the group.

As the talanoa started, race was specifically mentioned, but just like Talivakaola and Dan’s remarks, the idea of race becomes blurred or merged with the idea that race and national identity are the same thing. Also, being Tongan was more important than being a U.S. citizen. Their cultural identity as Tongans supersedes their U.S. national cultural identity as 'Americans' (because that is based on being white), so their nationality in the U.S. context is less important as an identity for those in this group. However, the premise of their being Tongan is based on a nationalist idea of being Tongan, so it is a selective nationalism based on a cultural Tongan nationhood, because they may or may not be Tongan nationals themselves. Tevita brings up how he has yet to visit and step foot in Tonga, but clearly expresses his pride in being Tongan. In the context of this study, Tongans do not experience a sense of belonging to or recognition as being part of the U.S., even if they are citizens. Also, Dan and Tevita both bring up personal experiences of being Tongan also includes being Tongan and [insert other racial/ethnic identity(ies)], which needs to be discussed further within racial formations and Pacific Island studies. Dan being mixed race and Tevita bringing up the fact that those of us included in his talanoa group were married to non-Tongans or mixed-race Tongans, shares how nuanced *being*

Tongan will continue to be in the future for Tongan people in the U.S. diaspora. The notion of being half of something is a blood quantum logic that is ingrained from colonial lenses. The idea of being fragmented instead of being whole or even double, that's also race playing out.

Culture

One of the hardest parts I've come to experience in my educational journey was the lack of courses on Pacific Islander history, culture, and identity. I wouldn't have noticed this disappointment if I wasn't exposed to ethnic studies and critical race literature and scholars, where I had the opportunity to engage, get a glimpse of, and learn about another group of people and their history. This allowed me to appreciate the contributions these various groups of people make to our local and global communities. It highlighted and gave recognition to a people and culture that have been historically marginalized and/or forgotten about. This made me aware that my culture was non-existent within the schooling system, and that I had to do more work to seek out this knowledge elsewhere. These spaces I consistently sought out were places I realized the undercurrents exist: within the home, familial connections, community gatherings, funerals, weddings, and (within the last 10+ years) the work breakroom spaces in the airlines. It is rare to find visibility of Tongan culture in U.S. mainstream society. However, that visibility doesn't seem to bother many Tongans as much since finding their way into the airlines. Tongans in the airlines gather and share/practice rituals, protocols, and the arts to help strengthen Tongan culture and values because what we experience in life and how we are socialized informs our cultural lens and identities.

"In our daily interactions with Tongan peers in the United States, we notice that the English language is much preferred over the Tongan language, even among native Tongan speakers" (Ka'ili & Ka'ili, 1998, p. 85). Since the Tongan language doesn't exist in many spaces

or have a sense of value within mainstream interactions and communication in the U.S., it can be easy for Tongan speakers to push aside the Tongan language and not practice it. Tupou Pulu, a Tongan language scholar, shares how Tongan children have a limited vocabulary of Tongan and as parents choose to speak more English in the home, that choice may signal to their children that Tongan may not be that important (Ka‘ili & Ka‘ili, 1998). Also, Tupou continues to share that Tongans may not see monetary worth tied to speaking Tongan because one doesn’t get paid to know it or use it.

Toa describes an experience she had while at work and compares that experience with the prior airport station she worked at,

> Working in Dallas, I worked mostly with ‘uli‘uli people [Black Folks] and the language and environment was different compared to here. I still remember my first time in Salt Lake, and I was sitting [in the breakroom] and all I could hear was people speaking Tongan in the background and I couldn’t believe it. I stopped and looked around and I was wondering, ‘where am I?’ It felt like I was at a family reunion, but I was at work.

Sefo Heimuli shared in his talanoa group,

> Working with so many Tongans, speaking for myself and those that were born and raised here in America, you tend to catch Tongan words and you’re able to speak better Tongan. When I come home, I’m able to speak more and more Tongan now that I’ve worked with the airlines. ‘Oku ai pe ha ki‘i fakamalo atu ka koe ‘Inoke [*I would like to thank ‘Inoke*]...[Sefo begins laughing].

Laughter from the group.

The airlines have unknowingly facilitated an environment where the Tongan language can exist, be appreciated, used, and learned. Although Sefo began to fakakata more towards the end of his comments by showing off a bit of his Tongan, the ability to use, hear and learn Tongan when going to work is a greater opportunity than what has been offered in school (and even church that usually happens once a week if one attends a Tongan speaking church service). This helps keep the Tongan language prevalent as it has been framed as an endangered language (Otsuka, 2007).

Toa shared a powerful imagery about a sense of familiarity as she forgot she was at work and not at a family reunion. Just by the sound of the Tongan language, it took Toa to a place where felt she belonged.

Dan Moleni began to speak about language with Talivakaola and Kongaika,

> I don't know if you guys ever notice, but I love to slide on through to sit at the table [in the breakroom] where the old timers are at. I love talking to the older Tongans because, to me personally, being Tongan from Tonga that speaks Tongan, there are some things you can learn from them that you can't learn anywhere else. They've been around for a while. You can take some time out of your day to speak Tongan with them and learn from them. I remember one time at the University of Utah, we had a politician from Samoa come speak to us. His name was Eni Faleomavaega...He said, "Language is the umbilical cord to a culture."

Talivakaola added,

> The OGs [urban vernacular for elders] at work, they open up more to you. Their personality comes out more when they know you can understand them. Even if you respond back in English sometimes, they'll still speak Tongan to you.

Kongaika continued by sharing his experience with the Tongan language,

> Growing up, my parents didn't really teach me Tongan. My Tongan is very minimal, but working in the airlines, that was one thing I appreciated was being surrounded by our people. My Tongan got better just by working around other Tongans and listening...I want to be fluent in Tongan and learn my culture on a deeper level than what I currently understand...I've actually seen multiple times where people have tried to express themselves in Tongan, and then they're corrected by the OGs on how to properly say it in Tongan. We have that expertise in the language, and we can rely on them to better learn the language.

Dan shared a quote by the late Eni Faleomavaega, former U.S. representative and American Samoan politician, "Language is the umbilical cord to a culture." I come to interpret this as, like what an umbilical cord does for a fetus in a mother's womb, language is what helps give life to a culture. Language nurtures and brings on a common structure of communication that is understood by those involved in a culture (Taumoefolau, 2012). However, as the umbilical cord is no longer needed, language has given enough life for those involved in a culture to determine

ways of moving forward. Being away from Tonga, Tongans must put in the extra effort to seek each other out, to gather, share practices/protocols, and learn language. Once again, just as Kongaika, Talivakaola, and Dan mentioned, we can acknowledge how the airline workplace has become an unofficial space where the Tongan language can be heard and spoken, and where Tongan culture is practiced.

Tongan culture takes on considerations of the way people gain and hold specific types of social rank within Tongan society. As the talanoa has been shared from previous chapters to this point, there have been comments regarding contemporary interpretations of nobles, kings, and commoners in Tongan society today. This is important as there is a long legacy of hierarchy which has changed over time. According to Latukefu (1968) and Gifford's (1939) explanations, there is an ancient stratification of a 6-tiered system of:

1. Ha'a Tu'i (paramount chiefs, including three that co-governed the region)
2. Hou 'Eiki (*elder and younger chiefly titles, local authorities*)
3. Kau Mu'a (*'Eiki/Matapule intermarriage descendants*)
4. Ha'a Matapule (*orators/talking chiefs, attendants of higher-ranking chiefs*)
5. Kau Tu'a (*common people, everyday subjects and attendants to chiefs*)
6. Kau Popula (*slaves, captives, servants*)

This then transformed with the modern national formation of Tonga into an emphasis of a three tiered socially stratified hierarchy adopting 19th century British monarchical concepts of King/Queen, Nobles, and Commoners. This has often been framed as having liberated Kau Tu'a and Popula, but Tongan theologian Nasili Vaka'uta (2008) argues that the gap of power actually increased between ranks at this time. This occurred through commoners gaining unprecedented rights on one hand, while nobles and royals increased their privileges exponentially through centralized power under a single paramount chief lineage turned Monarch and head of state. Besnier (2009) and Gailey (1987) add the role of socio-economic capitalist classism was fused with this modernized system, including heteropatriarchy with gender exclusive access to land

and property. In addition to this larger political social ranking system there is also a kinship based ranking system that is recognized within clans and villages, including elder status in relation to youth subordinates, heads of families, and chiefly sisters and paternal aunts, in fact even flowers and plants are ranked in Tongan culture. Rank is mediated at every level of society, and one might be higher ranking in one circumstance and lower ranking in another one. This cultural context adapts and is negotiated in workplace settings such as in the airlines.

One rank that I noticed came up in some of the talanoa sessions was the fahu. The fahu is the eldest paternal mehikitanga or aunt (and her descendants). She is the family matriarch and is treated with great respect by her siblings and their descendants. When one's fahu is not present, this fatongia falls upon the fahu's children, grandchildren and so forth. This honor tends to fall on the women in the family, but if no women are present, a male of the fahu's descendants may take on the fatongia. Rachael Haiola begins to discuss her familial connections in the airlines and discusses how she's observed the fahu system play out at work,

> I have a lot of family on the ramp, and a lot of first cousins. You all know the four sisters. Their dad and mom are brother and sister, and I'm actually their fahu. But I never play that fahu card, but all the other Tongans, especially the older ones, know my place. However, since I'm their younger cousin, in my head, since I'm younger than them [the sisters], I have to listen to them...I'll hear the older Tongan co-workers teasingly say to my cousins, 'You're not supposed to talk to your fahu like that, buy your fahu food, buy your fahu drinks.' But I don't ever hold that against them. But they do always treat me in ways where they are feeding me first or giving me their food. I don't expect them to do that, but they are just being Tongan and following culture.

Rachael talks about the complexities of being the younger cousin because she was taught to listen to those older than her. However, being from the fahu line, Rachael is recognized for the role she was born into and treated with respect by her older cousins. Also, this reflects a non-fixed hierarchy where one is not always the highest-ranking person. With Rachael, she is as fahu and she is not as younger, both simultaneously. There is a sense of potential balance in that she

might be young, but one day she'll become an elder. She might be someone's mehekitanga or fahu in one setting, but in another setting, she may not hold the honor of fahu because she may have her own fahu present she will be subject to.

I shared in that talanoa group how both my maternal grandmother and my mother hold the matriarch roles of the fahu in my family. During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, there was a funeral in Phoenix where my mother's first cousin, Reverend Sese Tohi, passed away. I traveled with some of my older cousins to pay our respects and help with the funeral preparations. It was sad to meet with our relatives due to the loss, but we were grateful to be reunited even if we couldn't have more of our family travel to the funeral due to the pandemic health and safety protocols. Since my maternal grandmother had passed away, my mother was not able to travel due to being sick, and my sister was not present, so I was asked to step in and fulfill the fatongia of the fahu. Typically, at a Tongan funeral, one of the roles is to sit in the designated seat for the fahu near the casket of the loved one. As I took my seat in the front of the services near Sese's casket, I was not there as myself, but taking in what my grandmother, my mother or my sister would experience if either of them were present. The harmonies of the Siasi Tonga Tau'ataina (Free Church of Tonga) hymns completely permeated the space and exuded feelings of 'ofa (*love*) and māfana (*warmth/exhilaration*). The delightful smell of the kahoa (*garland of fresh flowers*) that rested on the front of my chest and around to the back of my neck vaguely had a scent due to the mask that was wrapped around the bottom part of my face. The tears poured down children's faces as they sat cross legged and watched many patiently waiting in line for their opportunity to pay respects to their deceased grandfather. The mourning cries of the six daughters pierced everyone's heart as the casket was closing. If one was not familiar with Sese and his beautiful wife Selika, their reflection was on full display through the respect and

hard work their eight children demonstrated throughout the funeral. It was an honor to experience and be present in celebrating the life of Sese. In the words of his oldest grandchild and daughter of his oldest son, “He’s in peace and is no longer hurting.” I share this experience to contextualize fahu to understand how this is Tongan cultural knowledge, epistemology, and that is carried into the airlines.

In a society that is highly patriarchal, the role of the fahu is a breath of fresh air as it gives way for a matriarchal leader to guide and nurture those in her family and teach her descendants their responsibility to the family. However, the fahu isn’t always practiced with some Tongan families as there have been stories that some fahu are more worried about receiving gifts than fulfilling their fatongia. I am not one to criticize or celebrate the way Tongans practice and view the rank of the fahu, but for those that do not see the importance of the fahu, I hope they can recognize the possibility of the fahu being challenged by the patriarchy that exists due to adopted western systems that have lessened the fahu’s visibility and credibility within Tongan society.

As I shared earlier about a family funeral, Misi shared a bit about what had happened with the recent loss of a fellow Tongan co-worker, Maloni Taukei‘aho,

> To see how the culture teaches us how to take care of someone that goes down. The stuff that occurred with Maloni was very tragic. It was cool to see people come to show their respect. Even people that aren’t Tongan were showing up because they’ve learned about it over the years.

Maloni was well known in the airlines and was an individual that had a lot of knowledge and experience to share. He would put a smile on people’s faces, worked hard when flights were on the ground to attend to, and was a proud spouse as he helped support his wife in her pursuits of completing her doctorate studies. Many Tongans within the airlines and even some of the non-Tongan work leaders showed up with cultural artifacts, monetary gifts, and food to give to Maloni’s family. This process and act that Misi shared speaks to the Tongan influence and

culture within the airline industry. First, the family-like atmosphere that is created can be typically observed with cultural events like funerals that bring many families together to share space and extend time (Ka‘ili, 2017a). As Tongans in the airlines attend funerals of their Tongan co-workers, the time already spent consistently at work has nurtured the space and relations that the idea of family is also extended (even if there is no blood relation to a deceased co-worker). There is a sense of belonging that has been created that even non-Tongans feel comfortable joining in these spaces (when allowed) and learning about Tongan customs and culture, too. Those in leadership that are non-Tongan have worked long enough with Tongans in the airlines that they have learned the importance and time one takes during a funeral. Although there typically is no special treatment given for extended time off, the leadership has gained an understanding to find other ways (such as scheduling swaps, seeking for appropriate ways to receive time off, etc.) to support Tongans in the airlines in their grieving process. One other unique aspect that Tongans have incorporated is The Choir. Sione Kinikini, 17 years with the airlines, shared his thoughts on The Choir,

> Polynesians, Tongans, we love to sing. You could sit down with ten Tongans, and they’ll know how to figure out a five-part harmony with any song they decide to sing. When the choir came up all the Tongan men and Tongan women were all about it. The airlines said, OK, we have this cool thing we can do with the Polynesians, especially the Tongans… they sign up, and practice during worktime. That leaves shortage of workers on the ramp [*laughter*], but it’s cool because they are doing something to build up our culture within the airlines. This one thing I see that is Tongan and has been adapted into the airline culture. That is really cool.

The Choir started by singing Tongan songs, but over the years they have evolved and incorporated other co-workers interested in music to participate and add to what the choir can perform. The choir usually performs during Valentines and Christmas, and they have even been invited to the company headquarters to sing in a company worldwide event.

The work environment is special and, at least amongst the Tongans, there are enough Tongans in the airline workplace to create safe and meaningful relationships to exist. Toa described more about her transition to SLC from DFW, "...even though I don't know everybody, I do feel safer. I do feel more comfortable."

Samiuela, another airline worker that transferred from another station shared similar thoughts to Toa, "I feel Polys make a big difference here in Salt Lake, Tongans specifically. We want to do a good job...we want to be reliable and try to do things in a safe manner."

Langi Hola, 6 years with the airlines, shared, "A lot of these people stay [in the airlines] because there's a lot of Polynesians and Tongans at work. It makes work fakalata [*enjoyable/fun*]."

That sense of belonging and impact that the Tongan and larger Polynesian community has created in the airlines is what retains us as airline workers (not just the flying benefits/perks). There is a strong sense of community that makes work a fun place to be at, especially when it's happening over good talanoa and food during break time.

RAMP

There are various jobs that are available within the department I work in. One job is the loading and unloading of cargo, mail, and bags from the aircrafts. Depending on the type of aircraft and flight load, one can expect a heavy, normal or a light workload that requires moving around cargo, mail, and bags in/out of the aircraft bin(s). The work can be tedious. Most flights, one must crawl into the bin space and stay on their knees (knee pads are recommended) during the stacking of bags and/or unloading of bags because there isn't enough room to stand. If there isn't a belt loader that can extend into the bin space and retract when completed, two workers will jump into the bin. One worker will move and throw the bags to the other co-worker that is

near the door of the bin to then set the bags onto the belt loader, and the opposite occurs when loading a flight. One worker will get the bags from the belt loader and throw them to the other co-worker further inside the bin to stack the bags in a Tetris-like manner. The more bags, cargo and mail needed to go on or off a flight, the longer the crew is expected to be out working. The work can cause fatigue and injury if not taking the time to properly stretch and find ways to stay in good shape. It can also cause emotional frustration if one doesn't plan well before working a flight to have the proper equipment ready in the gate area and/or if one on the crew does not do their part to help the work run smoothly. In an earlier chapter, I gave a brief overview of some of the work responsibilities outside of loading and unloading bags. Here's a more in-depth knowledge of the ramp workplace:

- Checking to see if there is enough water in the aircraft tank (fill when necessary)
- Keeping count of bags going into an aircraft and following flight plans on where these bags are needed to be loaded properly to keep the aircraft balanced when in-flight
- Carrying and handling gate checked items (baby strollers, car seats, wheelchairs, musical instruments, etc.)
- Having the proper tow bar that fits and aligns with specific aircraft to push a flight on to the tarmac
- Maintain an on-time arrival and departure by guiding aircrafts to the gate area
- Drive and operate ground equipment (tugs, carts, belt loaders, push tugs, de-ice trucks, etc.)
- Transferring bags from one flight to connecting flights, especially prioritizing the bags that have a tight connection
- Dropping off bags to the local bag piers, so customers can receive their bags in a timely manner at the airport baggage carousel
- Retag bags that have misconnected or needs to be rerouted due to delays or cancellations
- Protect bags and equipment from damage, loss, and weather conditions
- Sorting bags into various carts that have been checked in locally and connecting bags that have come off arriving flights with longer layover times
- De-ice aircrafts before takeoff to prevent aircraft damage while in-flight (airports that deal with snow in the winter season)
- Maneuver aircrafts from the hanger, gates and/or different parts of the airport for maintenance purposes or preparing the gate for the proper aircraft to load
- Organize schedules, daily work responsibilities, and adjust accordingly when unexpected events happen
- Report any aircraft damage, equipment issues and malfunctions to facilitate quick repairs
- Handling the work in all types of weather conditions (heat, rain, snow, etc.)

- Follow safety guidelines and keep a safe environment for yourself and others

Tongans in the airlines have learned and taken this knowledge seriously regarding the ongoing labor around the ramp area to stay safe. But these same Tongans have also taken the time to learn how being Tongan has affected our experience within the workplace of the airlines. Pauli elaborates on how he's recognized Tongans in the workplace and the ways race, ethnicity, and culture play out on the ramp,

> If you're an ALA [Aircraft Load Agent or lead agent], tug driver, bin person, I wouldn't want my dad to stack. Even if I was the ALA, I would stack for my dad. I would do this not only to show respect, but to alleviate fatigue or pain he might feel during the work. And then being in spaces, like dispatching, I see my community being used in a sense for our bodies because we may be able to do a lot more than some people...So as a dispatcher, I see that, and I try to alleviate the stress and workload amongst my community.

Pauli breaks down some of the terminology of job responsibilities on the ramp. ALA is the Aircraft Load Agent or lead agent of the crew that oversees all tasks for the flight assigned. The tug driver is the individual that operates the tug to bring or take carts and objects around the gate area, and the bin person is the individual expected to do the labor of loading and unloading everything in the bin of the aircraft. Pauli also shared his family connection as he followed his father into the airline industry. He's taken opportunities to become an ALA and shared that even though he's taken on that extra responsibility, the role of Tongan culture and demonstrating faka'apa'apa (*respect*) is still important that he has stepped in to take on the bin responsibilities when he's assigned to work with his father. Pauli then shared how stepping into the role of a dispatcher, the agent required to assign workers to specific flights and gates, he noticed that his 'community' was being treated unfairly by past dispatchers placing them on multiple heavy flights. Pauli was referring to Tongans and the larger Moana airline workers when he mentioned

'community'. It's an example of Moana peoples being looked at as abled bodies ready to take on the heavier flights.

When I would share with other Tongans at work what my research entailed, I did not share many details other than researching with Tongans in the airlines. Many comments I would receive were related to observing and taking note of the number of times Tongans and other Moana co-workers were assigned to work heavier flights compared to our non-Moana colleagues, and specifically our white colleagues because they seem to be the most visible racial group in the workplace. From what they noticed; non-Moana co-workers did not work as many heavy flights compared to Moana co-workers. I unfortunately did not have the time to take on that task, but Pauli mentioned how he decided to step into the role of a dispatcher to 'alleviate the stress and workload of his community' as he and many others, as mentioned above, seemed to observe. This idea of Tongans being placed on heavier flights is like what sports scholars discuss as 'stacking', no pun intended (Dufur & Feinberg, 2009). "For example, coaches have demonstrated a tendency to place white athletes in central, decision-making positions (such as quarterback) while placing minority athletes in peripheral positions where the emphasis is on physical speed or strength (e.g., running back or cornerback)" (Dufur & Feinberg, 2009, p. 56). This is an example of racial logic playing out within the workplace.

Keeping on with the topic of sports, this idea of Tongans in the airlines being placed more often on heavier flights reminded me of collegiate sports and the visibility given to Tongans in tertiary schools. If a Tongan were seen in spaces of tertiary schools, the reasoning may be that the individual received an athletic scholarship as opposed to being present for the many other reasons one would decide to further their schooling beyond high school. This does not mean that there are not Tongans that receive athletic scholarships because many have worked

hard to earn the honor of playing sports and attending college, but this notion brings up so many other issues that become stereotypes for non-Tongans and/or internalized beliefs amongst the Tongan community that we are only good for our physical abilities and not for our intellectual abilities. For example, Senituli and ‘Ofa share some quick thoughts about Tongans, physical labor, and why the airlines (specifically the ramp) have been a good fit. Senituli begins by saying,

> For me, I feel like we’re more hands on learners rather than visual or sitting at a desk to learn something. I think that’s why a lot of us are at the airport because there is a lot of hands-on learning. We’re better suited for that. Sitting in a classroom for 40+ hours a week, that’s not fun for us.

‘Ofa adds,

> As I’ve gone to work at different stations, most people see Tongans as bigger, Brown Mexicans. I think we’re physically built to work manual labor. I think as Tongans, that’s what we do. We’re used to physical labor, our parents have always done it, our grandparents have always done it, and I feel like it’s just passed down to us. I feel like physical labor is easier for us than...going to school...for me, personally. I feel like I can get more stuff done if I work with my hands. I’m more effective that way than book smarts. That’s what works for me.

As I listened to what Senituli and ‘Ofa had to say, I did not necessarily disagree with them. I see my Tongan people as hard workers that have the physical abilities to perform well doing manual labor. However, what gets left out is the reality that Tongans also have many other abilities mentally, spiritually, and intellectually. If the focus on the airlines is purely physical traits, this sentiment devalues the knowledge that one gains through the multiple trainings that exist because of the constant changes to rules and policies with one’s airline company, local airport where one works, and the airline industry. Also, the guidelines and procedures that need to be followed for safety reasons and when new equipment is introduced to better assist one in their workday. Lastly, the concentration needed to be vigilant and attentive while on the job to make

sure colleagues, passengers, vendors, and in-flight crew members are safe on the ramp and/or on their flight.

In the talanoa sessions, I also recognized a cultural nuance in discussing more of the work process that was generational and gendered. However, this process became even more nuanced when the concept of work seniority was also considered. In an earlier chapter, I discussed seniority as a way of traveling and the way in which one navigates the standby list. Seniority within the workplace is important as it provides information on who gets to choose their shifts first. Seniority is determined by one's hire date. Typically, there is a period called a bid. That bid runs between three to six months before a new bid begins. Before a bid begins, management sets up different shifts that consist of job responsibilities, length of shift, and days off according to the upcoming months flight loads. Once the shifts are organized, the process of selecting shifts begins. The selection process starts with the individual with the highest seniority down to the most recent hire. Seniority also can give one a sense of status within the airlines.

Lio, Pauliasi and David began a conversation about a complicated situation of culture and work. David started off by saying,

> What I see that's important for us as Tongans is respect...say you're on a gate and you're with an older guy, you offer to jump into the bin to stack and whatnot. At the same time, it's still a job and we are all getting paid the same. But we still have that respect for the women and the older people that we work with.

Lio added,

> Let's say there's an old man, in the Tongan culture, and I have 15 years of seniority. This guy could have two years of seniority and if he tells me what to do, I gotta do it, you know what I mean. And then the supervisor asks why I didn't go to my gate? Then you get stuck having to explain yourself in and out of it, but our respect level is a lot higher to our elders.

Pauliasi then asked a question,

> I guess if I'm hearing Lio, that raises a question, where do we stop culture when it comes to our job? Or does culture override everything?

David quickly responds,

> For me, it's my job first because obviously it pays everything, puts food on the table, pays the bills, and all that other stuff. But I think of this more situationally, like at the gate. Let's say you have an older man or person working at a gate with you. You know we could say that we both get paid the same, but at the same time you're going to want to jump in the bin. That's just how we are, we have that respect.

Lio adds,

> We're constantly looking out for each other, especially the older folks. I'm pretty sure we don't jeopardize our own job. We try not to, and... even the older guys understand we're all there for our families.

We see how cultural teachings become conflicted with work seniority, as well as the value that's given to work over culture at times due to our dependency on capitalism to take care of our immediate needs (food, clothes, bills, etc.). However, this sense of faka'apa'apa continues to reappear when culture is discussed. We saw it when Pauli, a lead agent of the flight, decided to take on the bin responsibilities of unloading and loading for his father, and now David and Lio sharing their understanding of younger Tongans taking the initiative to take on those similar responsibilities when working with older Tongans and Tongan women. Rachael and Toa had some insights regarding this within their own talanoa session. Rachael shared,

> With our culture, I do go to work with the mindset that when I'm around my boy cousins you shouldn't swear or talk inappropriately. I do carry that with me those cultural ways to work. It's the whole respect thing. However, I don't expect...say I'm working with my older boy cousins, I don't expect them to jump in the bin for me. We're at work, this is what we all signed up for. I don't expect them to, but they usually always do. A lot of that has to do with our cultural ways. I don't expect that, but I understand. I'm a female, but I can do the work well...Being in a male dominated workplace, I grew up with five older brothers, so I'm used to being around guys. I was taught how I should be treated and how I shouldn't be treated...Also, I'm such a tomboy, growing up I was a tomboy even though I have my girly ways. I don't expect no man to do my job, but it's kind of my point of view on respect.

Toa added,

> The ramp really plays within the Tongan culture because it's such a team effort. There's something about the team aspect that Tongans really are geared towards. We are really good at working together and following through. I think it would be a lot harder if we were alone. I think that's where a lot of us thrive when it's in that group setting. As a Tongan woman, I'm smaller, but when others look at me they say, 'but you're Tongan and you should be like a linebacker or something, and you should be able to bench 200 [lbs] with no problem.' It's like the added pressure of being a Tongan and a woman because you are expected to carry your own weight. They expect you to do more than the palangi [white] women...however, I know when I work a flight with Tongan men, I know I won't be in the bin. It used to offend me at first, but through a cultural way, they are showing me respect. I show my respect by being grateful and allowing them to do their part.

Rachael and Toa both give some perspective of being a Tongan woman in the ramp area of the airline workplace. It's becoming clearer that the bin responsibilities are one of the intensive labor aspects of the workplace. We can continue to see faka'apa'apa being practiced in the ramp area, and rather than thinking of young Tongan men trying to 'show off' or disrespecting Tongan women by not allowing them to do the hard labor, it should be recognized as one's fatongia. I believe it's clear that Tongan women in the airlines can handle the workload and there is no need to prove anything. When, and not if, this does occur, it is the act of Tongan women being masculinized. Toa's remarks clearly illustrated the challenges of being a Tongan and a woman in the workplace and the expectation that they must perform like a Tongan, but also exceed the notion of what women should be able to do in the workplace.

Throughout this chapter, workplace epistemologies and the ethics of Tongans in the airlines continue to show ways of learning, navigating, negotiating, and being. Also, the strategic ways of adapting through negotiations has continued to allow Tongans to carve out space within the airline environment to include Tongan culture, practices, and protocols. Aspects of Tongan identity (racial, ethnic, cultural) are explored, language is given life, values are negotiated to still

be expressed, and culture is not hoarded but shared with non-Tongan co-workers within the workplace.

CHAPTER 8: ARRIVAL

I am named after my paternal grandfather and he is from Faleloa, Haʻapai, Tonga. My wife Tali and I were in Faleloa during the pregnancy of our first child. When we got to Faleloa, many people in the village mentioned that the grandson of Tutu Fale (*House Burned*) arrived. I was curious as to why my grandfather was called Tutu Fale, and everyone there told me (with a bit of laughter) to wait and ask my grandfather when I return back to the U.S. When Tali and I left Tonga and I got my first chance to talk with my grandfather about the name Tutu Fale, he had a smirk on his face and slowly began to share the experience of how he received this name. As a child, his mother told him that he needed to go to school and that he needed to be gone by the time she returned from her errands. When my great grandmother returned, she found my grandfather still at home and not at school. My great grandmother began to scold my grandfather and asked him why he did not listen to her and go to school? My grandfather, with no hesitation, told my great grandmother that he did go to school, but that it was on fire and so he returned home. My grandfather then looked at me and said, "Koe e founga ia ne u maʻu ai e hingoa ʻo Tutu Fale (*That's how I got the name House Burned*)."

I did ask my grandfather why he did this act, and he mentioned that no one really cared for his answer. However, he did share that he disliked being stuck in one place for many hours during the day, and he was not fond of the forms of physical punishment that existed within the walls of school. When asked what he would prefer doing rather than being in school, he said he

enjoyed learning from his father planting and harvesting crops. He enjoyed going to the sea to catch fish for his family. He enjoyed the work, but he also enjoyed the time being with family and community. That moment I realized my grandfather was a hero and a legend, and I was honored to carry his name. He is a hero to me because he challenged the violence of schools and schooling, and literally burned it down.

Although Tongans in the U.S. do not have high rates of continuing their schooling into tertiary institutions after high school, we have carved out space within the airlines to continue to create knowledge, practice culture, revive language, earn a livable wage, experience the world through skyscape, gain access to a form of the undercurrent, and enjoy each other's company even within a professional setting. The research questions that were posed for this study were the following:

1. How are Tongans navigating skyspace through the airline industry to gain learning opportunities?
2. What are the subversive 'undercurrents' (educational networks) found, created, and utilized by Tongans in the airline industry?
3. How do Tongans understand the workplace/airlines as an alternative learning space?

These questions allowed for the use of talanoa as the methodology to be had with Tongans in the airlines, but also served as a reflective process for myself as I was able to insert my experiential knowledge through autoethnography together with the data that was collected. The use of Tā-Vā and Critical Race Theories helped structure the research questions for this project, guide me to select relevant aspects from the data that respond to these questions, and to interpret and discuss meanings tied to the data. Tā-Vā Theory provided a Tongan philosophical lens on time and space for the research to be contextualized within and interpreted. Critical Race Theory helped identify

how Tongans, particularly those in the airlines and in the U.S. diaspora, situate themselves within the racial demography of the U.S. This challenged traditional research and dominant discourse, by viewing the experiences of People of Color (in this study, Tongans in the airlines) and their alternative learning spaces as strengths, while also recognizing their experiential knowledge. In this chapter, there will be an overview of the research findings, followed by recommendations in moving forward with this body of work.

CONTEMPORARY TONGAN STUDIES

It is unlikely to find any Tongan studies programs that exist in any tertiary institution in the U.S. However, throughout the findings there are aspects that demonstrate possibilities of Tongan studies and knowledge production expressed through the unofficial learning space of the airlines, specifically in the Ano Māsima and other spaces that have a highly concentrated Tongan employment. Now this does not mean that one must find employment with the airlines to gain access to this knowledge, but more so understanding that this space should be recognized as a place where Tongan knowledge, culture and language exists.

The introduction of vavā (*skyscape*) is what allowed the discussion around navigation to begin this study. Waterscapes were vital in the use of navigation by the way of the water for Tongans. However, the sky is now used as the place where travel happens for many Tongans in the airlines through their airline's standby travel policy. Through this benefit, many Tongans in the airlines can stay connected with their friends, family, hometown and even the motherland. The need to stay connected and keep good relations happens during events and special occasions such as weddings, birthdays, and even funerals. The need to attend these events and participate is what makes Tongans different from paying passengers and other standby travelers. This is what makes Tongan's contemporary voyagers. In this study, it is demonstrated that the knowledge of

voyaging consists of being aware of flight loads and flight schedules, seating assignments through airline standby policy (seniority, check in time, etc.), time zones, knowing city/airport codes, mapping out alternative routes (in case of full flights, delays, cancellations, etc.), preparing travel documents, and quickly becoming familiar with different airport layouts. If traveling with luggage and other people, the travel process becomes even more strategic. For Tongans getting to these special occasions to connect and nurture relations means being flexible as a voyager. In the best-case scenario, getting on a nonstop flight makes voyaging less stressful, but one must be open to the idea of alternative travel. That may consist of making one or more connections, and long layovers waiting to get on an anticipated flight. However, there are times after making all the possible connections and/or waiting for a flight to get on, one's travel may just mean returning home. The latter outcome may seem like a failed voyage, but the knowledge gained through the experience only enhances one's understanding around travel, and the sacrifice does not go unnoticed by one's relations. That makes the future voyages much more interesting and more certain on making the proper adjustments to arrive in a timely manner. Voyaging in general allows for new experiences that go beyond a book, just like many Tongans using travel benefits as an educational tool to explore different areas of the world that they, or their children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, siblings, etc. are learning at school.

Connections and relations, in this study, also consisted of viewing these ties through a Tā-Vā perspective. Tongans extend time during life events together with family (Kaʻili 2017a; 2005), but through travel, Tongans have also found ways to absorb time and condense space. This is done by traveling through the skies to faraway cities, other states, and even another country to retrieve/give koloa, attend events, or even a quick getaway. The distance between Los Angeles and Ontario (in Southern California) could take up to 2+ hours of driving during traffic.

However, within 25 minutes (or less), I could leave my home and get into a seat on a flight from LAX to SLC. The flight time would be 1 hour 30 min (or less). That means, Salt Lake City in relation to Los Angeles could technically be closer than Ontario in terms of time. This is an example that was discussed as an absorption of time and condensing of space.

The discussion in the beginning of this section of the airlines being a space to be recognized where Tongan Studies can occur is an example of the undercurrents. The undercurrents is a Moana philosophical and relational connection to the Black radical tradition that stemmed from the work of the undercommons. The undercurrents are nuanced with Moana sensibilities and seek to sustain and create knowledge that is relevant for oppressed communities through relationships that are forged between subversive intellectuals (whether they are 'in school' or not). In this study, there was an in depth look to better understand the decisions of Tongans going into the airlines compared to furthering their education in tertiary schools. It is recognizing that the airline responds to an immediate need of income and travel, but also that the Tongan community has a very visible presence in this space. This environment produces organic intellectuals (Tecun et al, 2021) that allow opportunities to engage in relevant and responsive Tongan cultural knowledge on the terms of Tongan within the airlines. No admission, tests, or fees required. The knowledge and ideas formed within the airlines is not hoarded within the space but taken to the community to be shared and practiced. This process also occurs as knowledge from the community is taken into the space of the airlines. This exchange of knowledge is a reason as to why Tongans are able to transition or pursue a job/career in the airlines. The ability to learn and produce knowledge together strengthens and gives a sense of positive reinforcement of understanding one's identity as a Tongan. The undercurrents also provide ways in which Tongans can be creative and build upon skills they may have or aspire to

gain. The data shared on flexibility not only was relevant and needed for travel, but flexibility given to employees to give away and/or take shifts allows some form of autonomy to Tongans in the airlines on how they can still move within the undercurrents. The ability to swap shifts around gives Tongans the opportunity to do more outside of the airlines, and further connect with one another to exchange different forms of labor. There are landscapers, electricians, residential indoor/outdoor specialists, podcast hosts, graphic designers, photographers, videographers, filmmakers, scholars, medical professionals, fitness trainers, law enforcement, intramural/local athletes, collegiate coaches, entrepreneurs, business owners, and more that are found within the network of the airlines. Once again, through the various talanoa, these connections extend beyond the space of the airlines, and into the community.

Lastly, the study focused on the workplace and the different ways Tongans engaged with work by learning what types of knowledge was attained through the work area and breakroom. The breakroom seemed to be where knowledge was learned, while the work area (or ramp) was where knowledge was experienced. A huge part of the section dealt with the exploration and understanding of race and how Tongans fit into the racial demography of the U.S. The takeaway of this was, although Tongans are considered an ethnic group of the AAPI and NHPI categories, many of the Tongans in the airlines understood Tongan to be a racial category and that race was connected to a nationalist perspective. This was interesting because it was a selective nationalism based on a cultural Tongan nationhood, since many of us are not Tongan nationals. Within the work area of the ramp, being Tongan meant that one's physical contributions were most important. Since there is a visible presence of Tongans in the workplace, it became prevalent within the data that Tongans (and Moana co-workers) were being placed more often on heavier flights to work. This meant flights that had more bags, cargo, and/or mail than usual flight loads.

This observation was one way that race could be identified and recognized within the workplace. Tongans seemed to begin stepping into roles of dispatching to alleviate the pressure and workload of Tongans being scheduled to work these heavier flights, but also a move to show the intellectual contributions that may have been overlooked by those in upper management.

The data continued on to share insights regarding Tongan culture and how this is played out in the workplace. Language was a key component as this allowed those at work feel a sense of belonging, to the moment a participant shared she felt she was at a family reunion because that's one of the only places she would hear the Tongan language. Outside of the home, church (if a part of a Tongan congregation), and community events that included Tongans, it is very difficult to ever hear the Tongan language spoken. The airline is one of the only other places one could hear, speak and learn Tongan in a professional setting. The Tongan language has unofficially become normalized within the workplace. It can be heard in the breakroom, and one can hear or speak work instructions/requests if on a team together with other Tongans working a flight. Tongan values are also expressed within the workplace, and the one spoken about the most was faka'apa'apa (*respect*). Social rank, gender and age dynamics were discussed and the importance of giving the proper respect within the various settings of the workplace because of one's fatongia (*responsibility*) within the Tongan culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Years ago, Moana 'Ulu'ave-Hafoka, Tongan storyteller and scholar, asked me to break down the Tongan word for school which is 'apiako, and when translated directly, 'api is *home* and ako is *to learn/to study* (Hafoka et al, 2020; Thaman, 1995). My grandfather's experience with school was not reflective of a *home of learning* or a *home of study*, hence the reasons why he decided to cancel school on his terms.

I realized that through this study, the airlines have been an unofficial temporal and spatial opportunity for Tongans to experience what my grandfather envisioned outside of school, but of course with restrictions. This experience in the airlines is had within the constructs of Tongans in the U.S. diaspora and current systems of power such as capitalism. I see this as not the end, but a piece to continue building upon in hopes to create an even more critical space that marks a responsive approach to Tongan Studies. These sites where Tongans are located may not be accredited spaces of learning, such as tertiary institutions. However, these sites need to be taken seriously because these are places where Tongan knowledge production is happening and transmitted. These sites are also worth criticizing, reflecting the complexity of Tongan knowledge. It is important to resist demonizing these sites, but also not to romanticize these spaces.

There was mention of mixed-race Tongans in the study, but not enough data to discuss concrete findings. As Tongans continue to exist in the diaspora and create relations with other non-Tongans, the reality of Tongan culture and identity will need to be in discussion with other racial and ethnic groups. Research around the continual changes of Tongan culture and identity is needed to better understand how these perceptions are being experienced and understood here in the U.S. This study reflects the process of engaging with populations to better understand the changing aspects of culture, rather than assuming what culture may be. Overall, Tongans need to be taken seriously and be pushed intellectually. All this can be connected to data disaggregation; however, this study pushes the conversation of various racial/ethnic groups doing better than others.

Data disaggregation is great to highlight the ways certain groups are overlooked due to being aggregated with much larger groups. This leaves these certain groups to be hidden and

issues not being resolved (for example in the AAPI category, diabetes has been hurting the Moana/Pacific Islander communities, but when aggregated with Asian Americans, this issue does not seem relevant). This study pushes more on data disaggregation to not just compare to see issues, but to get to a point where we can appreciate the differences within the various groups. It allows to find the unique lived experiences that explain practices that can be implemented to better support certain groups, and in this study support for Tongans.

If given more time and focus on work schedules and particularly Tongans that continue to attend tertiary school while keeping their employment with the airlines. This research could add to the literature regarding students that work and go to school at the same time and the nuances that exist being a full-time/part-time student and a full-time/part-time worker. In this study, there were some participants that worked and also were a student, but not enough data was collected (and may not have been enough participants that occupy both spaces) to fully give meaningful findings.

In the data, it is clear the internalized notions that as Tongans, we were meant for physical labor. There were moments where Tongans began to push back by stepping into roles that would allow for more decision-making opportunities. Opportunities to display intellectual capabilities. However, it's important to recognize the difference between challenging Tongans intellectually and pushing Tongans that involve material components that are racialized.

Lastly, for the airlines that have a large Tongan employment, revisit one's diversity statements and not only give jobs, but also give promotion opportunities. This will give Tongans in the airlines the ability to, not just be seen, but also be heard. For the philanthropic entity, seek out Tongan and Moana/Pacific Islander organizations to support on a community level. This demonstrates that the airline is mindful of their workforce. If the expectation for employees is to

go above and beyond in their jobs, there should be a reciprocal relationship from the airline to support their workforce beyond the realm of the company, and support initiatives and programs in the community.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to shed light on the peripheries of society, the margins in where Tongans find themselves, and the ways in which Tongans navigate these boundaries to still find ways to thrive in spaces we weren't thought of being in. This study brought focus primarily on Tongans to help disaggregate the large category of Moana (Pacific Islander) peoples to bring about nuances specific for this community, and to show what knowledge and experiences are lacking as Moana peoples continue to be clumped together in the larger aggregated category of AAPI. The experiences that Tongans have found to exist and do well within the airlines are examples that could help and better support Tongans that decide to further their knowledge into tertiary schooling institutions. The recognition of how Tongans created rhythms to carve out space in the airlines have allowed other Tongans to follow and gain a sense of belonging. This study helps reconstruct the meaning of ʻapiako (*home of learning/home of study*) within tertiary spaces and beyond, not only for Tongans, but inclusive of those that are also navigating society from the margins.

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