

Re-scripting life: New Zealand-born Tongan 'youth-at-risk' narratives of return migration

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Abstract: Tongan youth engaging in 'at-risk' behaviour is an increasing concern for Tongan communities in New Zealand who sometimes choose to invert the Tonga–New Zealand migration process by sending their children to live with extended family members in Tonga. The assumption is that these young people need to find their identity through immersion in *anga fakatonga* (Tonga ways of behaving). Narrative methodology was employed in the research informing this article to collect, understand and present the experiences of seven New Zealand-born youths who were sent to live in Tonga for various lengths of stay. It is argued that certain macro-narratives, such as 'youth-at-risk', influence the construction of their personal narratives and largely contravene Tongan cultural narratives. Although the youths faced many challenges acculturating into life in Tonga, the *'ofa* (kindness) with which their families received them, and their valuable learning experiences in formal, non-formal and informal settings resulted in them living according to *anga fakatonga*.

Keywords: education; identity; narrative methodology; return migration; second-generation; Tongan culture; youth at-risk

Introduction

Re-occurring stories of New Zealand-born Tongan youths engaging in 'at-risk' behaviour has become a concern for Tongan families in New Zealand. Truancy, fighting at school, excessive alcohol consumption, non-compliance to family rules, disrespect and criminal activity are included in the myriad of behaviours that some of these second- and third-generation migrant youths are demonstrating (Lee, 2003; Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs, 2003; Schoone, 2008). For the first-generation Tongan migrants, whose dream it was for their children to participate in better education and employment in New Zealand (de Bres, 1974; Lee, 2003), these behaviours demonstrate to them that the proceeding generations are increasingly departing from the form of *anga fakatonga* (Tongan ways of behaving) that the first-generation migrants by-in-large adhere to.

The growth in numbers of second-generation New Zealand-born Tongans is due to extensive Tongan migration during the 1960s and 1970s arising from New Zealand's need for an expanded, low-skilled labour market to aid New Zealand's economic development. There are now more New Zealand-born Tongans living in New Zealand than Tonga-born Tongans (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). Many first-generation migrants to New Zealand retain close links with their family in Tonga in practical ways, such as returning to visit relatives in Tonga and sending remittances (Cowling, 2005). For these migrants their cultural identity is continually reinforced through their participation in Tongan institutions, such as church and adherence to certain cultural practices and maintenance of the Tongan language at home ('Alatini, 2004). However, the strength of connection to Tongan culture and language, by some of the New Zealand-born migrants in the subsequent generations, is weakening. In one example, it is reported that New Zealand-born Tongans find it "highly awkward and embarrassing" when they are called upon to participate in ceremonial proceedings because they do not know correct protocol ('Alatini, 2004, p. 83). In terms of language acquisition, the 2006 census results reveal that 79% of overseas-born Tongan migrants are able to speak Tongan compared with 43% for those born in New Zealand (Statistics New Zealand, 2007).

Coupled with these factors that have contributed to the alienation of second-generation youth from the Tongan community in New Zealand, Tongan youths are further alienated from broader New Zealand society through their participation in behaviours deemed 'at-risk' and their disengagement from the

formal New Zealand education system (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). Lee's (2003) work with Tongan migrants in Melbourne Australia highlights the outcomes many of these youths face:

Only a minority of overseas raised youth are able to successfully navigate a path to acceptance by both Tongan and non-Tongans; those who have achieved educational success and social mobility (or at least the potential for mobility) while also acquiring the language skills and cultural competence necessary to be acknowledged as authentically Tongan. (p. 152)

One response to New Zealand-born Tongan youths' alienation is an initiative by some families to send their youths to live in Tonga with relatives or in a boarding school for various lengths of stay; thus, reversing the migration flow homeward to Tonga. This article draws from research that explored the experiences of seven New Zealand-born Tongan youths aged from 11 through to 16 years of age (namely, Tevita, Kevin, Finau, Vili, Pita, Feleti and one female Pohiva). These youths were identified to the researcher by either members of the Tongan community in Auckland or by those education professionals who provide alternative education to students alienated from mainstream provision. The research sought to understand the impact that the practice of sending New Zealand-born youths to Tonga had on the community in Tonga, and ultimately whether the youths themselves were successful in re-scripting their personal life narrative (Schoone, 2008).

Narrative methodology

The research methodology that informed the work was underpinned by narrative modes that state that ultimately people live storied lives, and the complexity of human experiences can be best understood by gathering stories. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) point out, narrative is both phenomenon and method. A founding expert of narrative modes of epistemology, Jerome Bruner (1987) provides a useful overview to the role narratives play in helping understand life experiences:

Life narratives reflect the prevailing theories about 'possible lives' that are part of one's culture. Indeed, one important way of characterising a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life. And the tool kit of any culture is replete not only with a stock of canonical life narratives, but with combinable formal constituents from which its members can construct their own life narratives. (p. 15)

Narratives exist at both a micro level (personal stories) and a macro level (such as cultural, societal or institutional stories). Personal narratives contribute to the construction of macro-narratives but are more often influenced by them. In this research project, prevailing societal and cultural narratives were explored alongside the personal narratives of the youth participants and their families. As a research method, personal narratives were acquired through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with the youths and their families, both in Tonga and New Zealand, where the researcher "enter[ed] the scene with a sincere interest in learning how [the research participants] function in their ordinary pursuits and milieus" (Stake, 1995, p. 1). This approach is similar to the Pacific research methodology *talanoa*, and is possibly a subset of narrative inquiry. Vaioleti (2003, p. 14) defines *talanoa* as "a personal encounter where people story their issues, their realities and aspirations and allows more *mo'oni* (purer, real, authentic) information to be available for Pacific research."

In the study the youth research participants were asked to reflect on their experiences in Tonga by identifying the challenges and the highlights of adjusting to life in Tonga and how these experiences compared with their life in New Zealand. The researcher explored the reasons that led to the youth being sent to Tonga with the sending family in New Zealand. The questions for the receiving family in Tonga explored the impact of having the youths live with them and how they viewed the youths' adjustment to life in Tonga. After these interviews were recorded and then transcribed, narratives

were written regarding each youth research participant whereby “the stories, spirits and emotions from the deep talanoa encounters are arranged and woven together” (Violeti, 2003, p. 19).

‘Re-scripting’ was the central concept utilised in the research to understand the process of change that confronted those youths sent to Tonga. Re-scripting is akin to the idea of acculturation: the adoption of behaviour, patterns, values, rules and symbols which modify the existing culture (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1988; Gans, 1997). Richardson (1990, p. 129) terms this process the act of “replotting one’s own life.” Sending youth to Tonga was a significant attempt by families to breach the ‘youth at-risk’ narrative construct to effect their youths’ rapid re-scripting to more culturally desirable narratives. The narratives of the youth’s experiences reveal how the individuals reacted to their immersion into *anga fakatonga* and the manner in which they acculturated certain aspects. The idea of re-scripting is not only descriptive but liberating because there is a sense that lives can be transformed by the manipulation of personal text.

A key element in understanding the experiences of the New Zealand-born youths sent to Tonga was to analyse how certain macro narratives informed the personal. For these New Zealand-born Tongan youths, two predominant and juxtaposed narratives emerged as influencing the construction of their own narratives: Tongan cultural practice and ‘youth at-risk.’ The remainder of this article begins by outlining these narratives. Following this the research findings are presented diachronically: that is, the narratives of the research participants are presented in the sequence of when they were experienced overtime, thus presenting a story-line.

Narratives of the first generation migrants: Anga fakatonga

Living the accepted notions of *anga fakatonga* is the predominant narrative for many first-generation Tongan migrants to New Zealand. Lee (1996, p. 20) maintains it is the “defining element of Tongan identity and the values and behaviours that comprise Tongan culture.” In her analysis of *anga fakatonga*, Thaman (1988) identifies the valued contexts for Tongan thinking such as the emphasis on the spiritual, the emphasis on rank and authority and the importance of Tongan traditions, *fakatonga*. But perhaps the defining element of the Tongan cultural narrative was highlighted by Thaman (2007, p. 9) when she articulates that in Tongan culture “the unique nature of the individual is normally deemphasized in favour of their relationships (*vaa*) to others, reflecting a relational theory of personhood and the importance of *vaa* in defining and giving meaning to people’s behaviour.” Equally important in maintaining these relationships is giving *faka’apa’apa* (respect) to those who it is due.

Another significant aspect to the Tongan cultural narrative is migration. Small (1997, p. 5) contends that migration for Tongan people is not merely an ‘outside influence’ interfering in the culture, but rather it is a part of the culture. Migration has been reinforced as a cultural practice for generations due to large numbers of Tongans migrating abroad during the 1960s and 1970s, which was preceded in the decades after World War Two by the acceleration of internal migration in Tonga, from the 32 habitable outer-islands to Nuku’alofa, for education and work opportunities (Small & Dixon, 2004). The father of one youth participant in the research recounted his narrative of family migration that closely reflected the literature on Tongan migration. His family moved from an outer island of Tonga to Nuku’alofa for the purposes of education, which ultimately predisposed the eventual migration of all his family to New Zealand and his arrival in Auckland in 1970. He stated, “You start getting bigger to bigger you know. [The island] is very small; Nuku’alofa is a little bigger.” It was the family’s aim to live in New Zealand, as he said, “I am very, very happy right now because most of the family are here. It was a dream.”

It is likely that conscription into the narrative of modernisation and assimilation for these first-generation Tongan migrants has been elusive in that the first-generation migrants have not embraced *palangi* culture to the detriment of their own. This is partly due to the maintenance of *anga fakatonga* by many of these first-generation migrants and the practical connections they have with Tonga

through remittances and practices pertinent to this paper. Clifford (1994) suggests this is a mark of a population that is diasporic:

Whether the national narrative is one of the common origins or of a gathered population, it cannot assimilate groups that maintain important allegiances and practical connections to a homeland or a dispersed community located elsewhere. (p. 307)

However, the idea of Tongan diaspora may only relate to those first-generation migrants; subsequent generations tend to grapple with maintaining a sense of Tongan identity as they try to acculturate into the New Zealand culture and, for some, this has meant assimilating into the less desirable aspects of that culture, namely 'youth at-risk.'

Narratives of the proceeding generations: 'Youth at-risk'

The youth narrative is underpinned by psychological theories of adolescence that emerged from developed nations. It assumes there are universal processes that are shared by similar life-stage individuals, largely regardless of culture, although cultural circumstances may affect some (Bucholtz, 2002). Therefore, the youth narrative creates a sociological category which extracts youth from their connectedness to their family and other involvements, and has the propensity to make this age group problematic. This has been seen with the emergence of the 'youth at-risk' narrative which posits that youth who become 'at-risk' are those who are not conforming to society's expectations (Tyyska, 2005).

For New Zealand-born Tongan youths 'youth at-risk' is a pervasive alternative identity narrative construct. This is because in the New Zealand context, 'youth at-risk' has mainly been attributed to Māori and Pacific youth (Smith et al., 2002). This has become normalised within New Zealand public discourse, as evidenced in reports on Pacific under-achievement in the education system and unemployment. As the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs (2003) points out, in the youth strategy document, youth who are alienated from their cultural roots are more likely to engage in 'at-risk' behaviour. Reports of Pacific 'youth at-risk' raises an interesting issue: the individuals' cultural identity narrative is obscured by their ascription to a generic 'youth culture' but also through being attributed as 'Pacific', which generalises the specific cultural narratives of each Pacific nation. For the youths in this research study, the reasons for their ascriptions into the 'youth at-risk' narrative were similar. These included non compliance at school and home, fighting, alcohol consumption and involvement in criminal activity (such as theft) and truancy. A comment by Tevita demonstrates how compelling the 'youth at-risk' narrative was for him: "I think I can't help but stay doing crime". One parent revealed how despairing it was for her; her son was out partying on weekends and did not return home until three o'clock in the morning.

School experiences appeared to be one setting where their behaviour digressed. For some participants it began with non-compliance at primary school. For example, Pita revealed that when he was six he physically assaulted a teacher. For others it was at secondary school where the youths often succumbed to peer-pressure. As Finau commented, "[Palangi are] free and they can go and do what they want... we see what they are doing and we copy." Finau's father saw his son "going astray" when he started to associate with friends from school who would encourage him to drink and "steal stuff from shops." Yet, for Finau there were other factors that contributed to his scripting into the youth 'at-risk' narrative. His palangi secondary school teacher encouraged him to be "anything he wanted to be" which had the unwitting consequence of de-motivating him in his learning as he did not know then what his career aspirations were. His aunty in Tonga explained that "he thought he will spend the rest of his life on the street with the kids there, because he didn't know what he was going to be." Feleti's mother was frustrated by his behaviour at school: "He was a brainy kid, a smart boy. Intelligent. And then, you know, he is not going to school."

These issues present a dilemma for Tongan families in New Zealand in that sending their children to school may contribute to weakening their children's personal cultural narratives. This is because the formal education in New Zealand is underpinned by the narrative traditions of Anglo-European culture. Tongan students therefore have to cope with dual learning environments, that of the home and that of the school (Gorinski & Fraser, 2006). This has inevitably led, in many cases, to Tongan youth underachievement. Tongan students achieve considerably lower than their Pakeha counterparts (Fusitu'a & Coxon, 1998, p. 25).

Along with demonstrating 'at-risk' behaviours, the youths' ascription to the Tongan cultural narrative was weak. Finau observed the dissonance in narratives between the generations. On the one hand, New Zealand-born Tongan 'kids' are "more in the way of New Zealand" while on the other "the parents and that, they still know the Tongan way." As Kevin explained, he believed that he integrated certain aspects of Tongan culture but these weakened over time: "Just like the respect... I had a little bit but I was slowly sliding away from it." For Pohiva's family, her lack of knowledge of certain cultural protocols became most noticeable when family were visiting from Tonga. In particular the youths inability to converse in the Tongan language or the lack of confidence to do so. This lack of cultural understanding was seen as a consequence of the pressures the families were under to provide for the household, leaving little time to adequately socialise their children. Kevin's aunty in Tonga observed that his family in New Zealand had no time for Kevin: "they go to work, comeback, cook, clean up: there is no time."

Breaching the 'at-risk' script

Given that migration can be viewed as a Tongan cultural practice, it is understandable that return migration has been utilised by the first-generation Tongan migrants in New Zealand to breach the 'at risk' narratives the youths live by and counter the negative consequences migration has had on subsequent generations. The practice of 'return migration' used for this purpose is not unique to Tongan culture, with incidents of similar practices reported in other international contexts. For example, youths sent from the United States to the Dominican Republic (Levitt, 2002), and Ghanaian children sent to Ghana from London (Akwagyriam, 2007). Cassarino (2004, p. 255) explains that return migration occurs due to a "failed migration experience that did not yield the expected benefit." In the case of youths being sent to Tonga, this return migration is for a defined period of time with the expectation of their families that the youths will return to New Zealand with a stronger cultural narrative. The idea that these youths can be re-scripted was given credence by the Director of Education in Tonga who declared: "There have been remarkable stories of children who were in trouble at home [e.g. in New Zealand], they come here and they go back completely different." In the research study, Kevin's father's explanation of the various reasons he sent his son to Tonga summarises most of the sentiments of the sending families:

The reason why I sent him to Tonga was to learn the culture; to learn the family life... to learn how to speak our language. That is why I take my son to Tonga; to love each other, the family, you know, and grow up together. It is starting to get lost, the change of time you can't stop.

Although individual youths were not 'returning' to Tonga as they were New Zealand-born, the act of returning scripts them into their family's migration narrative and their 'return' is essentially understood as the family returning.

Learning *anga faka'apa'apa* (respect) was emphasised by parents as a cultural tenet that they wished their youth to learn, and was more than purely academic learning. For example, Pohiva's uncle in Tonga stated that: "I think that education is not the first priority of why they brought them here... [but to learn] how to respect the sister, the parents." This sentiment was also a proverb that Finau's uncle in Tonga relayed: "better to be stupid and respect your parents than be wise and disrespect your

parents.” A further reason that the parents wanted their children to visit Tonga was, as Finau’s father put it, to: “see his roots and hardships” as the second generation had become too *fiemale* (too easily contented and satisfied) with their life in New Zealand. This was so the youths would see “how hard life is in Tonga” and therefore appreciate the living conditions in New Zealand.

Re-scripting life

Re-scripting of the youth’s personal narratives occurred soon after their arrival in Tonga through formal, informal and non-formal contexts; the three contexts that Taufe’ulungaki (2002) lists as critical when considering education beyond just formal schooling. In the research study, informal learning occurred when the youths lived with their families in a Tongan household, formal learning occurred through schooling, and non-formal learning primarily through their participation in church activities. The foremost theme in the Tongan cultural narrative which has provoked the most rigorous re-scripting in these contexts is the manner in which Tongan culture generally emphasises the importance of the family and collective values.

These values were first encountered by the New Zealand-born youths as they lived with their families in Tonga, challenging their individualistic mindsets. Kevin’s observation was that “a lot of time was spent with your family... you just stay home and realise you’ve a family and there is no trouble.” The families in Tonga received the youth with much *’ofa* (kindness) and welcomed them as “one of their own.” Therefore, after their initial welcoming there was no special attention afforded to the youths, and the expectation of their families in Tonga was that they would be included in all family activities. The youth were also given chores to do, such as working in the plantation. Feleti’s aunty in Tonga suggested that by giving him chores he would have less time to “hang around with the boys.” These expectations were first met with resistance by some youth. Finau’s aunty stated that it was “really hard... dealing with their overseas attitudes and trying to discipline them.” Tevita’s uncle relayed that Tevita was “first a bit reluctant to get into things but we managed to get him to church.” In the end these chores became important lessons for the youth, as shown in Finau’s following reflection: “And I learnt when we are on the plantation that all that hard work you get something from it. Hard work. [In New Zealand] I try to apply the hard work to school, to pass this year.”

Living with their families provided many other informal lessons. Feleti recounted a time when he disrespected some visiting female cousins. From this incident he learnt: “Respect is a big thing... mainly the girls, the females. I didn’t really know that. That’s why I learn how to [respect], like when you meet new family members and that, watch what you are saying and who’s sitting around.” Others learnt *faka ’apa’apa* (respect) inadvertently. For example, when Kevin’s older cousin began to help himself to his clothes and wear them around the home Kevin complained to his aunty in Tonga, who explained to him that “it’s the Tongan way, older people can take what they want. You have to learn; just have to learn to cope with it, and deal with it.” However, there were other aspects of living with his family that Kevin enjoyed, such as staying in the hut next to the main house. A common practice in Tonga in the socialisation of males (Cowling, 1990). The safe yet relatively loosely monitored environment of the Tongan *api* (home), coupled with the expectation that the males will be “rough, uncouth and wild” (Cowling, 1990, p. 179), appears to be a pragmatic approach and a perspective that facilitates socialisation of Tongan boys. Other aspects of home-life in Tonga also inadvertently facilitated the development of the youth’s thinking skills. Feleti explained how not having money to spend caused him to think:

When there is no money you learn to use your brain and stuff to think more, to think more smart. Not like in New Zealand... ’cause the money is easy to get, here it is not. Like you just think all the time: think of what to do, how not to eat to save food and power. So you just get smarter. You learn the basic things of life.

Finau’s aunty in Tonga said that her nephews from New Zealand staying with her learned to live without money because her sons taught them how to have fun without spending money. Furthermore,

the students reported that they had time to reflect on how their life had changed in Tonga. Tevita said that he used to lie on his bed at night and think about how much he had changed. In another example, Kevin's aunty encouraged him to reflect on his time in Tonga by keeping a personal diary. To help with his diary writing she asked him questions about what he thought the reasons were for him being sent to Tonga, and if he had changed.

An effective method of re-scripting in Tonga occurred when the families encouraged the youths to engage with them in talanoa (conversation). Pohiva's uncle in Tonga explained that:

Us, here in Tonga every morning and every afternoon we have a talk to them before we go to work, come back talk, we take most of our time spending talking to our children—sort out problems.

Kevin's aunty in Tonga enjoyed his company, and they would have 'little talks' when they would sneak out of the house for pizza. Her reason being that "those little talks with Kevin, that's what Kevin needs." Finau's aunty and uncle in Tonga encouraged him to confide in them: "We taught him you should be open to us, let us know what you want and things like that." With Pohiva, her aunty talked of the trust that she had established with Pohiva, "I had a lot of talk to her about our culture and I asked her what she used to do in New Zealand which her parents didn't know about it and she told me everything." These occasions of talanoa were transformative moments in that they were cathartic for the youths and also helped the families in Tonga to assist their youth to re-script. The conversations the youths had with their families were viewed by some youths as more beneficial in correcting behaviour than physical discipline that most of the males experienced in their stay.

In terms of formal schooling the parents chose to send their children to either church boarding schools or government secondary schools. The former was seen as the environment where students would best learn anga fakatonga. This was confirmed by Finau's statement about what he observed about how the school operates:

The school rules are basically Tongan culture. Like the prefects, you can't go near them: just like with the elders you can't go near them. And when you learn that in school, all those different aspects, when you got out of the school ground you are already used to it. So when you go out of the school you apply those aspects to everyday life.

Pohiva attended a boarding school because her aunty explained "there are certain things in our culture we wish Pohiva to know." Her grandmother was anxious for her to learn the skills to run a household. On the other hand, some Tongan families sent their children to government schools which are perceived as providing a more rigorous academic programme. However, the research revealed that regardless of the schools the youths attended in Tonga there were expectations of acculturation in both settings; perhaps more overtly at the church boarding schools. This confirms Cowling's (1990, p. 348) view that "the formal education in Tonga has also been an important agent for shaping people's understanding of their culture and society."

The schools the youths attended also provided a context where individualistic mindsets were challenged. Vili's observation from his time at the church boarding school was "we always have to go where everyone goes, we have to be as one." Other youths likened the boarding schools to being a family. Finau stated that the best thing about being at the boarding school was "meeting everyone, watching everyone, it was like a big family, like all brothers" and their brotherhood was expressed through *fetokoni'aki* (helping one another, co-operating). Finau's aunty observed that the older students care for the younger ones, "they take care of them in the classroom and in the bush." Pita found that, "in the plantation they [the Tongan-born youth] teach you how to hoe the ground... [as they]... work on the plantation from 3:30 until 6:30." Pita added that once you become accepted as a "real Tongan" you are left to work by yourself. A certain degree of reciprocity (*fatongia*) was expected from the Tongan youths who helped the youth from New Zealand, and this was enacted in class when the Tongan-born students needed assistance with English from the New Zealand-born

youth. Finau appeared bemused by the other boys in the class who, “come and tell you to write their essays for them.” Like the youths families in Tonga, their ‘family’ at the schools played a critical role in re-scripting their narratives. One ex-teacher from one of the boarding schools in Tonga observed this to be the case: “soon they get cultured, they get disciplined by the boys, not the school system.”

An important aspect to the youths re-scripting was their view of themselves as learners. Kevin explained that in New Zealand he was known as “really dumb”, and so he was surprised at his academic achievements in Tonga. He owed this to the teachers in Tonga who “pushed and pushed and pushed” him. Finding success in education became a motivation for Feleti to continue his formal education in Tonga, “After, when I found out that I passed the exams, I didn’t want to run away any more. School is fun. If I failed I would just keep running away. I don’t know how I passed.” A motivation for the students’ success was their families’ encouragement. Thaman (2007) points out that the success of the individual in Tongan culture is interpreted as the success of the family, and vice versa. This was evident in the research study when Feleti was cautioned to pass his exams and not shame the family as the results of the examination would be broadcast on the Tongan national radio. Feleti’s mother cautioned him, “You don’t want to put your head down.”

The New Zealand-born youths’ time in Tonga was successful in re-scripting their personal narratives to the extent that they demonstrated few of the ‘at-risk’ behaviours that the families reported in New Zealand. The research findings suggest that the youths were scripted into *anga fakatonga* to the extent they were recognised as ‘being a Tongan kid.’ The instrumental lesson the youths learnt in this re-scripting in Tonga was finding their place in relationship to others, *vaa* (Thaman, 2007), and this was most apparent in their family and school settings. The congruence of *anga fakatonga* espoused by these two institutions helped solidify this cultural learning. This finding conflicts with media reports which have stated that youths sent to Tonga from overseas practice their ‘at-risk’ ways in Tonga and also influence others to act in the same manner. For example one report stated that New Zealand-born Tongan youths who visited Tonga assisted Tongan youths deported from Salt Lake City in destroying businesses in Nuku’alofa in the riots of 2006 (*The growing fear of Pacific gang life*, 2006). A careful investigation in that particular event, which occurred when some of the youth research participants were in Tonga, revealed that no New Zealand-born youths sent to Tonga were involved in the riot (Schoone, 2008).

Conclusion: Continuing which story lines?

In the case of these Tongan youths sent to Tonga, their families initiated a process whereby their children could be immersed in *anga fakatonga* and if successful, would provide a resilient narrative construct to live by back in New Zealand. Finau’s aunty explained this sentiment: “I think [if] he spent time here in [the boarding school] he can be strong enough to stand when he goes to New Zealand and the pressures on the outside will not shake him.” Kevin also saw this benefit of learning *anga fakatonga* because he explained that it provides the knowledge to “know what to do when it comes to the hard stuff.” In another case, Tevita revealed that “there are two people in me. One telling me I am a good boy. The other telling me I am a bad boy.” and he admitted that in Tonga it was easier for him to be ‘good.’ These comments demonstrate the significant positive impact the re-scripting to *anga fakatonga* had on these youths. This supports Thaman’s (2007) view that with the onset of globalisation Tongan cultural values might facilitate Tongan people’s coping strategies in both Tonga and the countries they have migrated to. She recommends that cultural literacy be implemented as a part of the school curriculum.

For the research participants, the success of the living by their re-scripted narratives when they returned to New Zealand has been variable to date. Pita’s personal narrative was re-scripted to the extent that he decided to remain and live in Tonga. Finau’s parents’ decision to enrol him in a boarding school in New Zealand, as this had been a success in Tonga, appears to have been successful with reports of his re-engagement in education on his return. However, Kevin and Tevita returned to their ‘at-risk’ ways. Kevin’s aunty saw the progress he made in Tonga ‘unravel’ when he returned to

New Zealand. However, his father maintains that due to his time in Tonga “he’s got a little bit of Tongan in him.” His belief is that in time the experiences that were imparted to Kevin in Tonga will ultimately show positive results.

The research study demonstrated that the collective values embedded in the Tongan cultural narrative became the nexus of the youths’ educational achievement, relationships and identity. A challenge this research study raises is how these values can be transmitted in Tongan communities in the diaspora, in environments that espouse alternative and robust narratives. For families in the research study return migration was a cultural strategy utilised to facilitate a more preferable future for their children. Yet for others, they may need to depend on the construction of new narratives of *anga fakatonga* in the New Zealand context.

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